Plants Of Yrth

Ten Green Reasons for Adventure in *GURPS Banestorm*

by Thomas Devine

Setting details are a great source for adventures. They also give the game world flavor and style. This article will add to the ***Banestorm*** setting by describing 10 plants native to the continent of Yttarria. Each of these plants can be dropped into most fantasy settings fairly easily, and can also be used to spice up Planetary Romances, Space Operas, Lost Cities and/or Civilizations, as found in ***Steampunk*** or ***Cliffhangers.*** With small modifications, several of these fictional plants would make good transgenetic plants for a ***Transhuman Space*** setting. However, each of these plants is set on Yrth and has adventure ideas attached to it for that setting.

Bread Oaks

A close relative of the White Oak, it grows both as a tree or a bush. The acorns of the Bread Oak, unlike those of common oaks, are edible and tasty. These acorns are also more nutritious than any other known plant seed and are wonderfully easy to preserve. As the name suggests, Bread Oak acorns are ground into a flour which is as versatile as wheat flour and much easier to preserve.

Bread Oaks grow in all areas of Yttarria except the highest mountains and the Great Desert. They do best in temperate climates. They are hardy and provide stable amounts of edible acorns year after year. The Elves of Yrth created a truly secure food supply in the Bread Oak.

Game Uses: Bread Oaks have important military and political implications. Bread Oak acorns are excellent military rations: easy to store, easily made into bread, tasty when eaten raw, and excellent for keeping active people going. Any military leader on Yrth wants large supplies of these acorns for his troops and to destroy any supplies his rivals have. Heroes could be hired either to secure supplies of Bread Oak acorns or to sabotage another military's supply.

Bread Oaks are also a constant source of friction in feudal society. Peasants and central governments love Bread Oaks, just as local nobles dislike them. The Elves developed Bread Oaks to provide a *stable* food supply. In a good year or a bad one, Bread Oaks produce about the same number of acorns. Peasants love this. Nobles, who finance their ambitions on crop surpluses, strongly prefer wheat and rye. Central governments, especially Megalos, require that nobles produce a certain quota of Bread Oak acorns for the government's military needs, and the nobles need the acorns for the same reason. This creates constant friction and intrigue as local nobles try to keep the Bread Oaks to the minimum. Murders, riots, revolts, and other violence, come out of this conflict regularly. Adventurers can be spies for the local lord, a rival lord seeking to disgrace a neighbor, or the central government. Peasant PCs could seek revenge on tyrannical lords or play one set of lords off against the others to preserve their Bread Oaks.

Fayflax

Fayflax grows throughout northern Yttarria as a large bush, much like a mustard bush. Far easier to process than normal flax, and far more productive per acre, Fayflax is a major source of fiber for most of Yttarria. Human craftsmen can make excellent thread, like high quality linen from Fayflax, and also good paper as well. The Elves can also spin Fayflax fibers into silklike threads and produce the best paper on Yrth from Fayflax. This Elven paper is amazingly durable and tough as well as beautiful. Given its excellence, and lower price, Fayflax has displaced flax from every use except sailcloth. Flax seed is also valuable in its own right. But Fayflax is the main source of plant fiber throughout most of Yrth.

Game Uses: Elf Silk -- or gossamer, as high quality Fayflax thread and cloth are often called -- is highly sought after.

Alchemists and enchanters both seek it out as does anyone else who likes fine cloth. Intrigues and diplomacy are often needed to get Elves to part with the highest qualities of gossamer. The Elvish communities often use the gossamer trade to get needed concessions.

Several Sahud clans have gotten their hands on samples of gossamer. At least one has sent assassins to eliminate the supply, and two have sent ninjas to steal the secret.

The fine paper made by the elves are sought out by both the Church and Islamic religious authorities for the manufacture of Bibles and Korans. Since most Elves are worshipers of the Eternal, this requires diplomacy. Sadly, religious zealots of both faiths have been known to steal shipments of fine paper meant for the production another faith's holy book. Other zealots have been known to murder paper dealers who buy pagan paper for holy books.

Honeyroot

This plant common to northern and central Yttarria has large tuberous roots. The sap of these tubers is very sweet and tastes something like honey. This sap is often boiled down into syrups and candies; it is the major sweetener in Cathness, and commonly used throughout Yttarria. The rich use sugar and honey, the poor use honeyroot.

Honeyroot is also used to brew flowermede, a cheap alcoholic beverage. Peasants drink flowermede in the spring and summer and beer in the fall and winter. Poorer townsfolk also drink what they call root ale or bud water. As flowermede often smells like the local wildflowers, different brews are quite distinctive. The best flowermede is prized even by the aristocracy, while the cheap stuff smells like cheap perfume. All of it can get you drunk.

Game Uses: There are often strong local rivalries centered around the local brews. People have been known to sabotage and destroy rival breweries. Heroes could be to guard or harass a local brewery.

Pepperberries

The pepperberry is a close relative of the raspberry that grows mainly in Cathness, but is cultivated in much of al-Wazif, Cardiel, and Megalos. Ripe berries are a dark garnet red and have a strong spicy-peppery flavor. Pepperberries can be used fresh or dry to season food. A sauce is commonly made from these berries, as a means of preserving them. This sauce is as ubiquitous in the cuisine of Yttarria as ketchup was in the United States in the 1930-1990 period.

Game Uses: The highest quality pepperberries are prized by all of Yttarria's gourmets. High prices are paid for the wild pepperberries of northwestern and north central Cathness. King Conall has the right to a share of the proceeds of all pepperberry sales to foreign merchants. Even though he doesn't get profits from the rebels, he and his allies control all of the best pepperberries. These pepperberry sales represent a nice supply of cash to the crown of Cathness. While not a large part of the total wealth of the crown, the pepperberry revenues are a large part of the crown's liquid assets. Anyone hostile to Conall, or desirous of prolonging the Cathness civil war, or perhaps breaking up Cathness, would want to cut off this source of revenue. PCs could be involved in intrigues, river piracy, military action against river pirates, and any other means of blocking or preventing the blockage of the wild pepperberry trade.

On a less grand level, local cultivars of the pepperberry bush are highly prized and jealously guarded. Adventurers could be hired to steal cuttings or destroy plants grown from cuttings.

Luciole

The flowers of the firefly (French luciole) bush of Araterre glow gently at night. The Aralaise grow large , sweet-smelling, luciole bushes to light their gardens. The Balinese Aralaise make luminous paints and cosmetics, as well as paste jewels that glow when worn next to the skin. Alchemists find many valuable uses for the flowers, leaves, and roots, of the luciole plant. Products made from luciole are sold across Yttarria.

Game Uses: The time needed to make any alchemetic product involving light is reduced by up to half if extracts of luciole are used in the mixture. Enchanters can use luciole to greatly reduce the cost of light enchantments. Luciole jewel lockets (a paste jewel inside the locket that has a Continuous Light spell enchanted into it) are more convenient than lanterns and becoming popular among those who can afford them.

Luciole extracts and similar products are valuable trade goods and a magnet to the pirates that haunt the seas around Araterre. The heroes could be involved either way.

Fue Sucre

Sugared fire is the name given a large gourd native to Araterre. Ripe Fue Sucre gourds are ground and boiled, and the broth is stained. This yields a syrup that can be made into candies or cakes of gourd sugar, much like maple syrup. The main novelty with Fue Sucre, as the name suggests, is that this sugar is as hot as a good chili pepper. Fue Sucre candies are popular in Araterre and these red hots are a prized treat in most of Yttarria's ports. But the quality that makes Fue Sucre more than a novelty is that it repels insects.

By adding Fue Sucre sugar or syrup to any processed food, the cook guarantees that insects will ignore it. In a tropical land lacking refrigeration, a good tasting insect repellant is a godsend. This same property means Fue Sucre is in demand all over Yttarria.

Game Uses: Anyone who needs to preserve food in a TL 3 or 4 society would love to get their hands on Fue Sucre sugar or syrup. Even sprinkled as a power, Fue Sucre repels insects. Alchemists can make insects repellents from Fue Sucre (effectively TL4+5 insecticides). Fue Sucre is a classic high value/low volume trade good with serious military uses (armies have to eat). Fue Sucre can motivate robberies both for its monetary and military value. The PCs can be involved in trying to steal or guard, acquire or sell, Fue Sucre.

Saint Valentine's Daisy

These delicate blue and white daisy-like flowers with the pink tips on each petal are common in Cardiel, al-Wazif, and southern Megalos. The flower is named for Saint Valentine because that Saint's intercession is called for in cases of fever and infection, and this little flower is one of the most powerful medicinal herbs native to Yrth.

A simple wine (much like dandelion wine) is made from these flowers. Used either topically or ingested, this wine acts like a powerful antibiotic. The effects are stronger and faster the higher the mana level. This wine strongly enhances both alchemetic healing elixirs and healing spells. In both mundane and magical medical uses, both skill rolls and HT rolls gain a bonus if saint Valentine's Daisy wine is used. In low mana areas, the bonus is +2, in normal mana areas the bonus is +5, and in high mana areas the bonus is +7. Any aspected mana bonus to healing is doubled, while penalties to healing from aspected mana are halved. Saint Valentine's Daisy wine has no special properties in no-mana areas.

Game Uses: Quite apart from its value and the trade in flower wine, the fact that the benefits of Saint Valentine's Daisies increase with the mana level can set up any number of race for life plots. For example: A young squire -- dear to the heart of one of King Conal's more important allies -- is ill, and not responding to treatment. About two days ride away in the local woods is a hospital built by a healing spring and maintained and staffed by a lodge of healer mages. The area where the hospital stands is a little island of normal mana and the springhouse itself is high mana and healing aspected. The Saint Valentine's Daisies grown here can surely heal the lad. The heroes simply have to take a helpless young man, who would make a valuable hostage, through disputed territory without killing him. With variations, this scenario can be set up nearly anywhere on Yttarria.

Dyer's Rose

This plant, found mainly in Cardiel, grows as a tree about 20 to 25 feet high. It produces large rose-like blossoms and a small bitter fruit that look like crabapples. What makes this tree look odd is that its flowers always range across the

full spectrum of colors. Reds and oranges showing up on the southwestern quadrant of the tree and blues and violets to the northeast. These colors also show up in the flesh of tree's fruit. The juice of these roseapples is an excellent dyestuff.

If two or more Dyer's Rose trees are planted close together, the color pattern is played out over to group of trees. With two trees of roughly equal size, the more southwesterly tree would display the red, orange, yellow, and yellow-green flowers, and the northeasterly tree would display the blue-green, blue, indigo, and violet, flowers, If a large orchard of Dyer's Rose trees is planted, the rainbow pattern would be played out over the whole orchard.

Game Uses: Dyer's Rose is a major industrial crop in Cardiel especially in the southeast. Roseapples are sorted, dried, packed, and shipped out to all of Yttarria's dyemakers. It's an important part of any Lord's income. In Cardiel's highly competitive politics, losing a source of ready cash is always to be avoided . . . and everybody knows it. Mercenaries could be hired to damage crops, protect crops, steal, guard, or spy on the stealing or guarding, of the roseapples crops.

As the subtlest shades of color can be magically important, enchanters often hire agents to acquire the flower or roseapples of the perfect shade and hue. As other agents will probably want the same hue, there will be competition.

Saint Dominic's Bane

This large annual plant has dark blue flowers with a vaguely unpleasant sour smell. It's common throughout Yttarria and well liked by farmers because insects hate it. When Saint Dominic's Bane is grown with any crop, damages and loss from insects is greatly reduced. The juice of the blossoms, when rubbed on the skin make a fine insect repellant that last for about a week or until the user's next good bath.

The oily sap of the stalk is sometimes made into soap. Saint Dominic's Bane soap is a powerful insect repellent, but it smells bad. Most soapmakers mix the sap with other fats to make soap. This weakens the insect repellent effects, but vastly improves the smell.

Alchemists make a dark gray-green dye from Saint Dominic's Bane. Clothing colored with this dye repels insects for several years after it's dyed. The travelers, hunters, and soldiers of Yttarria prefer flea-, louse-, and tick-free clothing. In Araterre, some part of the bedclothes with always be dyed with Saint Dominic's Bane green to drive off mosquitos.

Game Uses: In a real TL3 society, a cloak that repels insects would be a treasure. Given that disease kills far more soldiers in low-tech warfare than fighting ever does, any Yrth military wants this dye. Some intriguers have been known to replace the Saint Dominic's Bane dye with common green dye. This leads to outbreaks of disease in enemy troops. The PCs could be sent to switch dyes, prevent a switch, or secure quality dye. Alternately, they could be con artists selling fake Saint Dominic's Bane dye. The heroes could also be falsely accused of passing fake dye, a charge that combines murder and treason; this would require them to clear their names or flee.

Scribe's Rush

A large reedlike plant found in every wetland on Yttarria. The stalks have fibers that are made into rope, coarse cloth, and paper. The seeds are used as the basis for most of Yttarria's ink. Rushpaper is generally good paper, but never of the highest quality. Rushpaper is cheap, common, and widely sold. The drapfond (rush wool) cloth is used like burlap or jute. Drapfond rope is prefered for ships rigging and all naval uses. However, encrefond -- the ink made from Scribe's Rush -- is the best ink on Yrth, especially for printing.

Game Uses: Most common pamphlets are printed on rushpaper to keep costs down. However, printing pretty much requires encrefond. Anyone tracking down illegal printers needs to know who has been buying rushpaper and encrefond. Anyone trying to hide an illegal printing press has to hide their purchases of rushpaper and encrefond. This has the makings of a classic cat and mouse game either way.

Galaxy Prix

by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

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Genre: Science Fiction Spaceship Racing.
Style: Cinematic.
Fidelity: Low (Space Opera or Anime).
Theme(s): Chases & Races; Winning at Any Cost?; Side Adventures.

The most popular sport in the Galactic Alliance of Systems is the *Galaxy Prix* -- the umbrella term for a host of different types of spaceship racing events. Players take on the roles of a space-racing team, out to win and look great doing it. On your mark, get set, and blast towards adventure!

What Everybody Knows

Galaxy Prix

Every fan of Galaxy Prix knows about the general structure of the sport as well as the various types of events, spaceships, teams, and individual crew members, as detailed below.

NOTE: This setting can easily be fleshed out further with more science fiction details -- alien races, cyborg pilots who link into their speedsters, FTL engines, non-vehicular robots, ray guns, transformable mecha, and enemy space empires, to name just a few elements -- as desired by players and GMs.

*Spaceflight in this Campaign in a Box is highly cinematic -- think **Flash Gordon** and **Star Wars** at one end of the spectrum, and **Firefly/Serenity** and **Babylon 5** at the other. That is, ships and objects come way closer to each other than they would in any sort of realistic depiction of spaceflight.*

The Galaxy Prix Commission

The *Galaxy Prix Commission* is the unifying body that develops the rules regarding vehicle construction, team composition, and each type of race; trains and assigns Commissioners to establish rules, administrate events, and referee the races; controls membership in the Gold and Silver Leagues (see below); and tracks the scoring of Pilots and Teams over the season.

As far as Galaxy Prix is concerned, the word of a racing Commissioner is law, and can only be countermanded by a higher-level Commissioner. Each event has several ranked Commissioners involved in and responsible for everything from course safety to public relations for the event up to the Race Commissioner, who is where the buck normally stops. (However, appeals can be made to the Sector Commissioner or even the Galactic Commissioner, if necessary.)

The Racing Leagues

There are two racing Leagues: the *Gold* and the *Silver*; both have a six Alliance Standard Month-long season. The Gold League is the "major" league, with Alliance-wide coverage and interest; the Silver League is the "minor" league, with sector-wide coverage and interest. Technically, there are several of these subleagues, one for each sector, that all run local events. Depending upon how well or poorly a racing organization does during a season, they can be promoted up, remain in their current League, or demoted down.

Types of Races

Galaxy Prix is really a collective, general name for a wildly varying set of racing competitions, listed below in a rough order of increasing complexity.

"Practice Laps"

For any type of competition below, teams are often permitted to do one (or more, depending upon the event) "practice laps" around the circuit or flightpath of the race. This gives different Team Members (see below) a chance to develop their individual and collective strategies for the official race. Pilots and Navigators figure out how to best fly the path and take "pace notes." Spotters identify hazards along the circuit. Engineers modify ship systems to better handle the type of competition (adding extra maneuverability for Obstacle Courses, increasing jet output for Speed Trials, adjusting the power of the inertial dampers for Fragile Courier races, etc.).

"Qualifying Laps"

Some races select starting position or launch times of the competitors randomly, but more often a racer's *grid position* -- where or when the pilot starts the race -- is determined by a "qualifying lap" around a circuit (which may or may not be the actual race flightpath). The fastest pilot gets the best position or launch time (called "pole position"); the slowest pilot gets the worst (called "tail-end charlie").

Speed Trial

Speed Trials are flat-out "how fast can you go?" type races. These can be on a closed circuit -- usually a large circular or looping empty flightpath. Sometimes there are space-landmarks or buoy-satellites to maneuver around.

Obstacle Course

Take a Speed Trial and throw a whole bunch of junk in the middle of the flightpath, and you get an *Obstacle Course.* While usually plotted through a naturally occurring asteroid field, some competitions involve artificial obstacles. These sorts of races are "how fast can you go without smashing and crashing?" events.

Team Parallel Races

A *Team Parallel Race* is any sort of race where multiple pilots from a team are participating in the event at the same time. These are most commonly Speed Trials, Flag Quests, and Dogfight Derbies.

Team Serial Races

Also known as *Team Relay, Team Serial Races* are competitions where a single pilot at a time participates in a set number or laps or legs and is then replaced by a new pilot and ship for the next set of laps or legs. Team Serial Races are often Speed Trials, Obstacle Courses, or Fragile Couriers -- and sometimes combine multiple types in one event.

Flag Quest

These races require the pilot or pilots to collect "flags" (any small item or element of information) on a course of circuit; to win, the team members must have the required number of flags as well as the best time. Flag Quests can get hideously complex, and are often combined with other sorts of races (especially Rally Races).

Fragile Courier

Also called *Egg Carry* races, *Fragile Courier* events involve the transportation of a delicate instrument or package that must be intact when the pilot crosses the finish line. A broken Egg can penalize points or time, or even disqualify a racer.

Rally Races

Rally Races are not run on a single circuit or flightpath; instead, they are run in separate timed *legs* (point A to point B; point C to D; and E to F), with untimed *stages* between the legs (point B to C and point D to E). Rally Races usually provide a wide variety of conditions -- different types of Obstacle Courses, Obstacle Courses mixed with Speed Trials, unique space hazards (flying through heavy radiation belts, skimming a gas giant's atmosphere, or slaloming through a star's solar prominences), and so forth. A good Rally pilot is regarded inside the Galaxy Prix world as a cut above the average racer.

Dogfight Derbies

Essentially space combat with simulated weapons, *Dogfight Derbies* are an up-and-coming Galaxy Prix event. Purist fans generally dislike them, since they're not really races -- but they are wildly popular.

Winner's Circle

Galaxy Prix

What can space-racers win in these supreme contests of speed and skill?

Individual & Team Points

Individual racers are awarded points for their performance in an event; the Team adds up all the points earned by their individual members. At the end of the season, points are totaled for both, to give the *Season Champion Racer* and the *Season Champion Team.* It is definitely possible for a Pilot or Team to not take the first place prize in any individual race of a season, and still walk away as the champion.

The Galaxy Prix Commission gives point awards to the top five pilots (and thus their Teams) per event according to the chart below:

First Place: 6 points
Second Place: 4 points
Third Place: 3 points
Fourth Place: 2 points
Fifth Place: 1 point

Prizes & Purses

Individual race events usually have the following rewards for the top placewinners (consider 10 Prize Credits as equal to enough money to build a totally new ship; 5 Prize Credits to repair and refit a heavily-damaged ship or several less-damaged ships; and 1 Prize Credit as enough to perform routine repairs and maintenance on all racing and support craft *and* pay all of the crew's living expenses and salaries for one month):

First Place: 8 Prize Credits

Second Place:	4 Prize Credits
Third Place:	2 Prize Credits
Fourth through *Eighth Place:*	1 Prize Credit

Individual events, especially those sponsored or underwritten by a Sector Government or MegaCorp, may have additional -- and often idiosyncratic -- awards. For example:

- The team that garners the most points in the Fomalhaut VII Team Quest gets a Team Purse of 3 Prize Credits.
- The winner of the Buuqada System Rally (2 legs along the rings of the gas giant in the outer system, 2 legs through the asteroid belt, and a speed trial from the belt to the system capital) receives a temporary Knighthood within the system, which lasts until the checkered flag goes down on the next Rally.
- The racer that comes in *last* in the Alpha Regula 15K has his or her ship painted yellow and is roundly mocked for a week after the event.
- The winner of the BioShield Industries Cup takes home an additional purse of 2 Prize Credits for his or her Team, 1 Prize Credit for himself or herself, and a Sector-wide endorsement deal (see below).

Endorsement Deals

People love winners. People especially like to purchase products endorsed by winners. SectorCorps and MegaCorps often hire race winners and season champions to hawk their wares. Depending upon the skill, style, and record of the character (and the depth of the PR pockets of the Corp), this can be extremely lucrative: average endorsement contracts run between 4 and 6 Prize Credits.

Of course, signing a contract like this means that the new Corp Spokesman has certain required duties to perform on behalf of the Corp: opening supermarkets, doing AllianceNet commercials, or cozying up to Corp Directors at the "executive retreat" on the Pleasure Moon of Zuxual.

Types of Spaceships

Each of the types of races mentioned above can be further qualified by the type of spaceship used to compete in it -- for example, an Obstacle Course run with a Speedster and an Obstacle Course run with a Stock Ship should be two different events. Racing teams normally have a few of each of these types of craft on hand (except for the Team Support Ship), representing a substantial capital investment for the owner(s) of the team.

Most racing spaceships are *subluminal*; since they have to be fast in normal space, why carry the mass of a hyperwarpdrive? Other spaceships are *superluminal* and can break the light-barrier and enter hyperswarpspace -- handy for getting from system to system for racing competitions; they are, alas, usually fairly slow in normal space. Teams will need access to one or more superluminal ships to get themselves and their ships to Galaxy Prix events.

Stock Ship

Stock Ships are off-the-shelf (aka "stock") subluminal vehicles used for racing purposes. Early on, this class of ships was driven unmodified, but over the years of Galaxy Prix, the Commission has permitted Teams to modify and alter them for racing purposes. By the current rules, no specially engineered or uniquely constructed parts can be included in a Stock Ship -- all must be commercially available. Stock Ship racing is thus of great interest to Mechanics.

One-Design

One-Design are custom-built and common subluminal vehicles. The point of a One-Design ship is that it is exactly the same as any other One-Design ship; they are built with simple or black-box components that don't permit much -- if any -- tweaking or alteration. The idea here is that the skill of the Pilot, rather than the technology of the spaceship, determines the winner of a One-Design race. Thus, these sorts of races are beloved by Pilots.

The current supplier of One-Design to Galaxy Prix race teams is Tatsunoko Technologies; they provide three different models of One-Design ship: the G-1 Eagle (fast and streamlined), the G-2 Condor (sturdy and powerful), and the G-3 Swan (nimble and efficient).

Speedsters

Speedsters are subluminal vehicles that are custom-built and unique to their Team. This is where the Team tries to show the superiority of their spaceship technology as well as the skill of their Pilot. Teams must construct their Speedsters to achieve specific operational minimums set by the Galaxy Prix Commission. Speedster racing is of especial interest to Engineers, but some Pilots are fascinated by the potential to perfectly match skill and spaceship.

Team Control Ships

A *Team Control Ship* is a floating headquarters for a racing team. It is a superluminal craft, containing -- at the very least -- ship cradles for racing and support ships, repair bays, crew dorms, cargo space, a sickbay, a race control module, a galley, and a rec room.

Support Ships

Support Ships are general purpose subluminal spaceships used for spotting, tug-towing, onsite repair, refueling, ambulance, and spotting purposes by a Team. They are very rarely used in races, though there are one or two special competitions set up for them (often called "space rodeos").

Types of Teams

There are three main types of racing team participating in Galaxy Prix: Constructors and two types of Factory Team.

Constructors

Constructors are Teams without Corp sponsorship; if an organization or company of their own (sometimes called a *SoloCorp*), they are dedicated to racing over vehicle production. Constructors are usually small, tightly-knit, and have much less funding than a Factory Team. However, they are specialists and enthusiasts, living to race and racing to live. Some lucky constructors are underwritten by wealthy sponsors as a hobby.

SectorCorp Factory Teams

SectorCorp Factory Teams are underwritten by a smaller Corp; they are essentially technology testbeds and PR arms of the company. They are often formed to help drum up investor interest in their commercial designs and technologies. They are usually medium-sized, organized, and decently -- if not extravagantly -- funded. The difference between a Constructor Team and a SectorCorp Factory Team is one of intent: Constructors are solely about racing, while SectorCorp Factory Teams have to balance business concerns with competition concerns.

MegaCorp Factory Teams

MegaCorp Factory Teams are formal divisions of a galaxy-wide Corp. They are primarily used for PR and advertising purposes, but this doesn't mean that they aren't serious about racing! They are put-together to boost the reputation of the MegaCorp over all things. MegaCorp Factory Teams are usually large, formally organized, and well-funded, but they impose plenty of contractual requirements upon Team members. The differences between a SectorCorp Factory Team and MegaCorp Factory Teams are related to funding of the Team, the limitations on Team freedom, and the "good of the Corp" over the "good of the Team" issues.

What Everybody Doesn't Know

Well, not much that anyone doesn't already suspect.

Racing Teams are often involved in illegal gambling and race fixing scams, are in the front lines of corporate skullduggery between Corps, provide plenty of opportunities for graft and bribery to influence government contracts for shipbuilding, and are sometimes believed to be spies for other system or Sector governments.

There are always rumors of terrorist groups covering their operations through the use of Teams (who travel everywhere), and it's whispered that government researchers sometimes test out advanced or secret technologies under the guise of being a Constructor Team or SectorCorp Factory Team.

PC Opportunities

Players should all take the roles of members on a racing team; together with the GM, they should decide with what type of team (see above) they are. (It's suggested that the PC group should be a Constructor or SectorCorp Factory team, starting in a Silver League, but this is not mandatory).

Also, in small Teams, members often cross-train in *at least* one other team role, for the sake of safety, back-up, and efficiency. An Owner may also be the Public Relations person, an Engineer might also perform the duties of a Manager, and a Pilot may also be a back-up Navigator and emergency Medic.

Possible Team Members

Pilot: Pilots are skilled in flying spaceships. While they might specialize in a particular type of race or ship, this is not mandatory (and is mildly recommended against for PC Pilots, unless the gaming group wishes their Team to be rather structured and optimized, because it can influence general adventuring capability).

Navigator: Navigators ride along with Pilots (when permitted to) in order to enhance the ship's ability to avoid obstacles and dangers; Navigators can also serve as gunners.

Spotter: Spotters follow the race along -- but off -- the flightpath or circuit, to advise the Pilot of upcoming dangers, their current position, and other race strategy observations.

Engineer: Engineers design new technologies and parts for spaceships.

Mechanic: Mechanics repair, rebuild, fuel, and modify spaceships.

Owner: The Owner underwrites the company, and often has the supreme veto power over Team decisions.

Manager: The Manager keeps the Team running, and makes the decision regarding all the nuts-and-bolts issues involving the Team. A Manager is the strategic leader of a Team.

Public Relations: The Public Relations member of a Team deals with the public, setting up advertising venues and other photo-ops for the Team. They also are the ones who usually deal with Galaxy Prix Commission issues and interact with the Commissioners of an event.

CorpRep: A CorpRep interfaces with any Corp sponsors, channeling communications and directives between the Corp and the Team.

Doctor: The Team Doctor keeps the Team healthy and heals them if they are injured and cares for them if sick.

Medic: A Team Medic is trained in emergency response and first aid with the goal of stabilizing an injured Team member for transport back to the Team Control Vehicle's sickbay and the tender mercies of the Team Doctor.

Vehicle Itself: Some Teams are dabbling in sapient AI, and treat these "smart ships" as full Team members rather than just equipment. Currently, Galaxy Prix does not recognize robots as qualified solo racers, but individual events (read: individual Commissioners) have permitted them as Co-Pilots or Navigators. *NOTE: Depending upon the Galaxy Prix campaign, the legal status of robots and droids might be an issue of interest.*

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 concept 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.)

GOTCHA Vehicles SoloCorp Team

GOTCHA Vehicles is a small spaceship start-up company, hoping to field test its designs in Galaxy Prix events, build up capital from race winnings, and interest outside investors in the small SoloCorp. All of the members of the race Team are joint Owners in this company, except for Swallow -- which irritates it immensely. (While it's rumored that Team GOTCHA performs "extracurricular activities" when not racing, it's not exactly clear *what* it is they're doing.)

Pilot **Ken Hunter:** Ken is an Expert Pilot, Good Brawler, Good Charismatic, Good Manager, Average Courier, and Poor Obsessive Duty to the Team. He is the leader and CEO of GOTCHA Vehicles. He is involved in a romantic triangle with June and Joe -- while he has strong feelings for June, his friendly rivalry with Joe and his Obsessive Duty gets in the way.

His ship is a Speedster called the *Warp Go,* which is notable for its Expert Speed, Good Maneuverability, and Good Extras (Laser Cannon).

Pilot **Joe Fokker:** Joe is a Good Pilot, Good Brawler, Good Crack-shot, Good Mechanic, Good Navigator, and Impulsive as Hell (Poor). He loves to stir up trouble, usually with other race Teams, especially in spaceport bars. He is involved in a romantic triangle with June and Ken -- he has strong feelings for June and a friendly rivalry with Ken. He also likes to pick on Rhys.

His craft is a Stock Ship called the *Comet 9,* which is notable for its Expert Toughness, Good Speed, and Good Extras (Gatling Railgun).

Doctor **June Hayes:** June is an Expert Doctor, Good Pilot, Good Spotter, Good Public Relations, and Stubborn (Poor). While Ken may be the Team leader, she's not afraid to stand up to him if she thinks he's making a mistake. She is involved in a romantic triangle with Ken and Joe -- she is interested in the former for his genuine concern and sense of duty to others, and to the latter for his wild nature.

Her craft is a One-Design G-3 called the *Michi,* which -- like all G-3s -- is notable for its Good Nimbleness and Good Endurance. Rhys has whipped up an Extra for June, though: a combat-grade Expert Force-field Booster that plugs into one of the G-3's standard outside equipment ports.

Vehicle **X-0P** *aka* **Swallow:** Swallow is a sapient AI in a highly modified Support Ship shell, and supports the team's racing activities. It is a Good Pilot (of itself), a Good Mechanic and Good Medic (and contains various modules of tools to aid in these roles), and possesses Good Endurance as well as a potent Extra -- a Good Tractor/Pressor Beam (which it can use as a weapon). Unfortunately, its unique programming has fouled up its vocoder modules, which cannot be replaced without damaging its personality, causing Swallow to have an Irritating Bleep/Bloop Speech Impediment (Poor). It is especially friendly with Rhys and (to a lesser extent) June.

Engineer **Rhys Mifune:** The scion of a long line of racing enthusiasts, Rhys is an Expert Engineer, Good Mechanic, Good Medic, Good Strong as an Ox, Average Navigator, and Average Pilot; he is often looked down on for his Bluntness of Speech (Poor). He often is drawn into Joe's barroom dust-ups quite against his will. He views Swallow as his closest friend, follows Ken without reservation, and is often at odds with Joe.

Rhys flies the GOTCHA Vehicles Team Control Ship, the *Djinni,* which is notable for its Expert Toughness, Expert Repair Bays, and Good Sickbay.

Events & Possible Story Arcs

Random Race Generator

The charts below provide a method of randomly generating a race event. GMs can use either a single 2d6 roll or a series of 2d6 rolls to generate the type of race, the type of ship involved, elements of the race's name, and a possible Side Adventure (see below).

2d6 Roll	2	3-4	5-7	8	9	10	11	12
Type of Race	Fragile Courier	Speed Trial	Obstacle Course	Team Parallel Race	Flag Quest	Team Serial Race	Dogfight Derby	Rally Race Leg (roll again)
Type of Ship	Stock Ship	One-Design (Planet Name)	Speedsters	Stock Ship	One-Design (System Name)	Speedsters	Stock Ship	Speedsters
Race Name Element 1	Streaking		Warp	Argent		Golden	Blazing	Leaping
Race Name Element 2	Comet	Prix	13	Hyperspace	Dash	Chase	Nova	Pulsar
Side Adventure	Celebrity Event	Mystery	Entertainment	Courier Work	Caravan Escort	Bounty Hunting	Smuggling	Espionage

Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls

Chases & Races

A simple but interesting game system for chases and races is the heart of a Galaxy Prix campaign. The rules below were inspired by the chase rules in *Unknown Armies,* 2nd ed. (Atlas Games) and modified for the Vehicles rules of *Truth & Justice* (Atomic Sock Monkey Press). They should be easily adaptable to any other game system.

Spaceship Rules

Just like NPCs (see above), spaceships have strengths and weaknesses that can be ranked. These strengths and weaknesses can combine with those of the piloting character (when appropriate) to great benefit. For example, if a Good Pilot in a ship with Good Speed was trying to go fast, he could add those two Goods together. However, if he was trying to pull off a tricky maneuver, the Good Speed of the ship probably wouldn't help him out.

The common qualities that spaceships have include: Endurance (going steadily or for a long period), Maneuverability (being nimble), Speed (going fast), and Toughness (resisting damage). A ship can also have Extras (cool toys or capabilities: weapons, hidden storage, onboard repair systems, remote drones, cloaking device, etc.) that might be

useful in competition or in Side Adventures.

NOTE: If a player is portraying a ship as his or her character, the Vehicle PC can add (or subtract!) his or her own Piloting ability to that of any character serving as the Pilot! This means that a Vehicle PC that has Good Piloting and is being driven by a Good Pilot can add their Goods together. This combines with any qualities like Speed or Toughness or Nimbleness possessed by the Vehicle PC and relevant to the situation at hand.

Racing Rules

- Races are 2d6+6 lengths in duration. (At the GM's option, players may not know the exact total length of the race.)
- The first grid position ("pole position") is +2 lengths for the pilot in that position on their first turn. A "good" grid position is worth +1 length on first turn. The last grid position ("tail-end charlie") is worth -1 length.
- Every turn, each pilot gains a base of 2 length, modified by the interaction of the Course Difficulty and their piloting roll (2d6 plus Pilot Modifier).
- Course Difficulties: Master [13], Expert [11], Good [9], Average [7], Poor [5].
- Pilot Modifiers: Master [+6], Expert [+4], Good [+2], Average [0], Poor [-2].
- Basic piloting roll result:
    - Match or beat Course Difficulty = +1 length
    - Fail to match or beat Course Difficulty = +0 length
    - Highest result of all basic piloting rolls = +1 length
    - Lowest result of all basic piloting rolls = -1 length
- Hazards on the course are positioned at certain lengths; these have Hazard Difficulties using the same scale as Course Difficulties. Obstacle Courses have many Hazards; maybe even one per segment! When a racer enters or passes the length containing the hazard, he or she must make an additional Piloting roll to bypass it. (Alternately, if the individual race permits ride-along Navigators, the Navigator can roll to bypass any Hazards.) If a Pilot has the advice of a Spotter, he or she may get a +1 or +2 bonus to Piloting at the GM's option.
    - Match or beat Hazard Difficulty = +0 length
    - Fail to match or beat Hazard Difficulty = -1 length
    - If racer fails to match or beat Hazard a second time during a race, he or she has cracked up on the hazard and is out of the race (the racer, the vehicle, or both may even be damaged).
- Taking a Risk -- shortcuts, redirecting half of the shield power to the engines, cutting tight corners -- can gain extra lengths. The player determines the risk taken, but cannot use the same risk twice in one race. The GM decides the Risk Difficulty (usually Average [7] or Good [9]), and the racer makes a piloting roll. (Navigators and Spotters may be permitted to suggest a Risk; some GMs may also want them to help determine the Risk Difficulty through rolling against their relevant ability: success could mean the lower level of Difficulty, and failure the higher.)
    - Match or beat Risk Difficulty = +2 lengths
    - Fail to match or beat Course Difficulty = -2 lengths
- Daredevil Maneuver -- reversing the polarity of the reactionless drive, gravitic slingshot speed boosts, pulling a "Crazy Ivan" -- are insane risks taken for potentially great advancement in lengths, but with the strong chance of cracking up. The player determines Daredevil Maneuver attempted, but cannot use the same Maneuver twice in one race. The GM decides the Maneuver Difficulty (usually Expert [11] or Master [13]), and the racer makes a piloting roll at a -1 penalty. (Navigators and Spotters may be permitted to suggest a Daredevil Maneuver; some GMs may also want them to help determine the Maneuver Difficulty through rolling against their relevant ability: success could mean the lower level of Difficulty, and failure the higher.)
    - Match or beat Maneuver Difficulty = +5 lengths
    - Fail to match or beat Maneuver Difficulty = the racer has cracked up on the hazard and is out of the event (the racer, the vehicle, or both may even be damaged).
- After their basic Piloting (and, if necessary, Hazard) rolls are made, Pilots can choose to take either a Risk or perform a Daredevil Maneuver at any time before the current Turn ends.
- Highest length at the end of the Turn when a racer crosses the "finish line" determines the winner.
- GMs may find it handy to sketch a quick series of boxes equal in number to the overall length of the race, with

each box suitable numbered, to help keep the locations of Hazards and characters' current lengths straight.

Example of a Race

Galaxy Prix

1. GM rolls 2d6+6, generating a 12 length race.
2. The GM determines that the course has a Good [9] Difficulty, and places a Hazard at length 8 -- an Average [7] "subspace cross-rip."
3. Alpha (Average [0] Pilot), Beta (Good [+2] Pilot), and Gamma (Expert [+4] Pilot) are all flying One-Design Ships (Average in all respects, providing no bonuses to their rolls) provided by BlandCorp. Alpha has pole position and Gamma is tail-end charlie.
4. On Turn One, all characters get the base length, plus position bonus, plus Piloting roll vs. Course Difficulty result.
   - Alpha rolls a 7; this is a failure, placing him in length 4 (2 base + 2 pole position bonus + 0 failed roll).
   - Beta rolls a 10, plus 2 for her Pilot Rank, for 12; this beats the Course Difficulty, placing her in length 3 (2 base + 1 successful roll).
   - Gamma rolls a 6, plus 4 for his Pilot Rank, for 10; this beats the Course Difficulty, placing him in length 3 (2 base - 1 tail-end charlie penalty + 1 successful roll).
   - Beta rolled highest with 12, and gets a +1 length, bringing her to 4.
   - Alpha rolled lowest with a 7, and gets -1 length, bringing him to 3.
   - Summary: Beta (length 4), Alpha (length 3), Gamma (length 3).
5. On Turn Two, all characters get the base length, plus Piloting roll vs. Course Difficulty result.
   - Alpha rolls a 7; this is a failure, placing him in length 5 (3 + 2 base + 0 failed roll).
   - Beta rolls a 7, plus 2 for her Pilot Rank, for 9; this is a success, placing her in length 7 (4 + 2 base + 1 successful roll).
   - Gamma rolls a 7, plus 4 for his Pilot Rank, for 11; this is a success, placing him in length 6 (3 + 2 base + 1 successful roll).
   - Gamma rolled highest with 11, and gets a +1 length, bringing him to 7.
   - Alpha rolled lowest with a 7, and gets -1 length, bringing him to 4.
   - Summary: Beta (length 7), Gamma (length 6), Alpha (length 4).
6. On Turn Three, all characters get the base length, plus Piloting roll vs. Course Difficulty result.
   - Alpha rolls a 9; this is a success, placing him in length 7 (4 + 2 base + 1 successful roll).
   - Beta rolls a 5, plus 2 for her Pilot Rank, for 7; this is a failure, leaving her in length 8 (7 + 2 base - 1 failed roll).
   - Gamma rolls a 9, plus 4 for his Pilot Rank, for 13; this is a success, placing him in length 9 (6 + 2 base + 1 successful roll).
   - Gamma rolled highest with 13, and gets a +1 length, bringing him to 10.
   - Beta rolled lowest with a 7, and gets -1 length, bringing her to 7 -- she hasn't advanced at all!
   - Gamma has crossed length 8 and hits the Average [7] subspace cross-rip Hazard. He rolls vs. Hazard Difficulty and gets a 4, plus 4 for his Pilot Rank, for a result of 8, and surfs the cross-rip easily (+0 length).
   - Summary: Gamma (length 10), Beta (length 7), Alpha (length 7).
7. On Turn Four, all characters get the base length, plus Piloting roll vs. Course Difficulty result.
   - Alpha rolls a 10; this is a success, placing him in length 10 (7 + 2 base + 1 successful roll).

- Beta rolls a 9, plus 2 for her Pilot Rank, for 11; this is a success, placing her in length 10 (7 + 2 base + 1 successful roll).
- Gamma rolls a 7, plus 4 for his Pilot Rank, for 11; this is a success, placing him in length 13 (10 + 2 base + 1 successful roll) -- which will end the race at the close of this Turn.
- Gamma and Beta tied rolls, so no one rolled highest -- no bonus.
- Alpha rolled lowest with a 7, and gets -1 length, bringing him to 9.
- Alpha and Beta have crossed length 8 and hit the Average [7] subspace cross-rip Hazard. Alpha rolls vs. Hazard Difficulty and gets a 5; failing to navigate the cross-rip, the subspace currents rip the engines off of his speedster -- he's out of the race. Beta rolls and gets an 11, and bypasses the Hazard.
- Beta has already lost, unless she tries to make a Daredevil Maneuver. She goes for it, telling the GM she wants to repolarize her ventral shields to bounce off of the subspace cross-rip at high velocity. The GM estimates that to be an Expert [11] Risk. Beta rolls 11, plus 2 for her Pilot Rank, minus 1 for the Daredevil Maneuver penalty, for a result of 12 -- she makes it! She is now at length 15 (10 + 5 daredevil maneuver).
- Gamma could take a Risk or try to pull off a Daredevil Move of his own to boost his length total before the end of the turn, in order to beat Beta. However, a simple Risk will only cause him to tie with her, and a Daredevil Maneuver could get him hurt -- and he's got a hot date with Delta later. So, Gamma decides to be a good sport and take the second place Prize.
- Summary: Beta (length 15), Gamma (length 13), Alpha (length 10).

Winning at Any Cost?

Racing-based campaigns have a lot of potential for the hard question of "What will you do to win?" Separately and together, PCs can be presented with several challenges, either in the form of a "golden opportunity to initiate" or "become the target of" any of the issues below:

Cheating: Illegal modifications to ships; taking unapproved short-cuts; attacking opponents during a race; having one's Team attack or interfere during a race; taking performance-enhancing drugs; and so on.

Sabotage: Physical sabotage of opponents' ships; physical or psychological sabotage of opponents (drugging, frame-jobs, and blackmail are all popular); or booby-trapping the race flight-path or circuit.

Betrayal: Will a character abandon a Teammate to injury or death during a race if it means assured victory? What about an opponent? What happens if a Pilot or Team is offered a substantial amount of Prize Credits under the table to throw a race? Plus, corrupt Galaxy Prix Commissioners or CorpReps (on the Team-side or the Corp-side).

Side Adventures

What do the characters do when they aren't racing? Here's a short list of possible Side Adventures for Teams to get involved with:

Bounty Hunting: A little skip-tracing and head-busting on the weekends never did no one no harm. Plus, collected bounties can be handy in keeping payments up on that G-1 Eagle.

Celebrity Life: Maybe the Team parties-hearty, swans around with other famous people, busts up space-hotels, goes to gala AllianceNet premieres, and so on.

Courier Work: Fast ships. Skilled pilots in need of Credits. Messages or objects that cannot be trusted to usual carriers. Any questions?

Entertainment: Perhaps they perform "space shows" with precision piloting and stunts. Or maybe they play in a band (see ["Campaign in a Box: Behind the Musick"](#) for more ideas here).

Escort Tradeships: Slap a few weapons on the Team's racers, and they can defend supply ships and traders from the point the caravan exits hyperwarpspace until they land at the local Spaceport (or from when they take off and go superluminal, or both).

Mystery Solvers/Crimefighters: They fly high-speed spaceships -- and fight crime! The Team might stumble into some weird mystery that needs to be solved. Maybe the spirit haunting the Ghost Planet is really Old Man Ghostal dressed up in a yellow sheet...

Smuggling: Team Control Ships gain go superluminal, have a lot of room to hide contraband, and all their extra equipment and ships makes it that much harder to properly search. Plus, they have plenty of reasons to be bouncing around from sector to sector following the Galaxy Prix events. A little surreptitious smuggling can earn enough credits to get a Team flying until the next race.

Spies: Whether political or corporate, espionage is a great opportunity for professional athletes who travel from system to system. Just don't get caught, or it won't be your jets that flame out, Speedy.

Sponsorship Deals: Serving as pitchmen for athletic shoes, designer space-jeans, and new spaceships can earn both Credits and a modicum of celebrity... and pull the Team into business hi-jinks.

Other Resources

- [A1 Grand Prix](#)
- "Car Chases," *Unknown Armies,* 2nd Ed., (pp. 59-60)
- [Formula One](#)
- [Grand Prix motor racing](#)
- [*The Great Race*](#)
- [Rallying](#)
- [*Science Ninja Team Gatchaman*](#)
- [*Speed Buggy*](#)
- [*Speed Racer*](#)
- [Stock car racing](#)
- "Vehicles," *Truth & Justice* (pp. 71-72)
- [*The Wacky Races*](#)
- [*Wonderbug*](#)
- [*Yogi's Space Race*](#)

Pyramid Review

Dungeonville

Published by [Z-Man Games, Inc.](#)

Designed by James Ernest & Mike Selinker

Developed by Falko Goettsch

Art by John Kovalic

Five pawns and 105 blood tokens in five colors, 64 adventurer cards, five 32-card dungeon decks, five entrance cards, five deed cards, six town cards (including deed house), & one seeing stone card; full-color, boxed, two to five players; $24.99

It's a dirty job, but someone's got to do it. The town of *Dungeonville* is, for want of a better term, "blessed" with many local dungeons. You and your fellow mad geniuses have inherited these, and are trying to outdo one another by killing the most brave, adventuresome souls.

The object of the game is to be the first wizard to kill seven adventurers with your dungeon.

There are five dungeons, including poorly lit pits like the Ice Cavern and the Rat Haus. Up to five fiends can play. Since it's their primary export, Dungeonville offers several places to meet and greet potential adventurers, with richer heroes hanging out in pricier places. Each has a class (barbarian, sorcerer, peasant, etc.), rank, color, and set of dungeon combat stats. The heroes who can carry the most hang out at the tavern and demand the most money, and go in descending order until you can hire the toughest fighters on the street for free. The "starting player" (a position that rotates each turn) chooses first, replacing his hero selection from the deck. The newcomer falls into the numerical pecking order, shifting others up or down to accommodate him.

Your team picks a dungeon entrance. Multiple parties at the same place must duke it out for the privilege of dying there. Participants arrange their heroes in order secretly, then flip them over one at a time. The "higher" rank (the lowest number) wins; if the colors differ the loser dies, but if they're the same (blue on blue, say) the winner recruits the loser to his team. You may therefore find yourself with extra troops, or be forced to work shorthanded. When the dust settles, whoever has the most survivors gets to go inside (the loser just sits this turn out).

Each hero has the five dungeon symbols on his card, rated A (the best) to E (the worst). To explore a dungeon, you flip its cards up one at a time. You can keep any items that show up, though only the right classes can use them (otherwise turn them in for gold). Other dungeon cards have letters (A to E, but you knew that) matching their victims. B cards kill someone in the party rated B for this dungeon, for example -- leave your blood counter to show the dungeon has claimed a victim. If no one dies and it's not an item card, you can escape the dungeon -- or take your chances and flip the next card. Your party can only carry as much gold as the team's total ranks (those "lower" ranks with higher numbers are good here), so losing members means a smaller possible haul.

The funds you drag out purchase new team members, or (with fewer than five players) buy a spare deed from the Deed House in exchange for the one you have. That's useful if the new dungeon has claimed more lives than the property you owned, and since dying in your own dungeon subtracts from your score, you may wish to unload it. Once you've amassed seven kills -- those who have died in your dungeon plus anyone you wiped out at various entrances -- you reveal your deed and announce victory.

The components for the game are, in a word, lousy. James Ernest may have had a hand in the design, but apparently the pieces are too cheap to be called cheap-ass. The box is the best part; it's sturdy as all get-out. The dungeon cards are hard to separate let alone shuffle. They give you several rubber bands, but they're more like thin latex straps and may not last. The hero deck is better quality. These are somewhat mushy and perfect for shuffling, but a flick of the wrist will bend them the wrong way. The town cards are improperly cut, leaving chunks of paper hanging off the edges. And the deed cards (that are supposed to be secret, mind, lest your whole strategy comes undone) are printed poorly enough that some may be recognizable. At least the misprinted component list underestimates the pieces you actually get.

Setting aside the material issue, you've got a pretty decent game here. It's another one that's better off with a bigger complement of friends, and the rules have one of those piles of half-answered questions that usually merit their own web page of addenda, but clearly Mssrs. Ernst and Selinker have labored hard to make all the mechanics work out right. Knowing whether to attack a fellow player is tough -- there's a whole lot of second-guessing and bluffing to be done. Just about anywhere you go you're stepping on someone's toes. In a two-player game, it's too easy to fall into a non-competitive pattern. If the two of you are all decked out for taking on separate caverns and daren't try to outmaneuver each other at an entrance, only judicious, anticlimactic, possibly random (read: tedious) deed-switching scores you more blood counters.

Dungeonville's strategies are still rich and explorable, even if the game feels a little dry. John Kovalic's pictures are perfect, and the names of the heroes are the game's second-best feature (that swell, swell box . . .), but after that . . . the cards have fancy names like the "Glacier of Shards," leaving the mechanics to add any more "color." Your job is to try to keep track of what letter cards have been played in the dungeon you're confronting, not to work past traps and monsters. It's not a tilt-o-whirl of excitement, but it's an engrossing, cutthroat pastime that takes well-spent time to master.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Ghostfighter (for a|state)

Published by [Contested Ground Studios](#)

Written by Gregor Hutton with Malcolm Craig & Mark Whalley

Cover by Paul Bourne

Illustrated by Paul Bourne & Gregor Hutton

40-page US Letter-size black & white 6.4 MEG PDF; $6.95

One of the most interesting games to have come out of Scotland since SLA Industries is Contested Ground Studios' *a|state,* best described as a dark and gritty RPG of Dickensian Science Fiction. Bar the supplement, *The Lostfinder's Guide to Mire's End* and several downloads available from the publisher's website, there is not a huge amount of support for the game. This is a shame as the game certainly deserves it. To counter this lack, Contested Ground Studios is producing a number of supplements in PDF format. The first of these is *Ghostfighter.*

The ghostfighter is one of the game's signature character types, the ultimate in melee combat specialists. He is a knife fighter *par excellence,* eschewing the use of the impersonal firearm and preferring to wield the ghostfighter's signature weapon, the Llife. Made of bonded layers artificial diamond and ceramics, the Llife is an extraordinarily sharp slashing weapon capable of slicing through dense materials and inflicting nasty cuts to a victim. Considering how sharp and painful a paper cut is, just multiply with a Llife . . . If you cannot get to a doctor or hospital for such a wound, then one solution is the use of Ghostfighter Glue, a flesh-bonding adhesive that binds the cut closed to leave a nasty scar. Another trademark of the ghostfighter is the Ghostfighter Coast, tailored to the individual with not just armored inserts, but also with a freedom of movement that will not impede a ghostfighter's fighting style.

Essentially *Ghostfighter* is a player's guide as much as it is a GM's resource. The layout is neat and tidy, sprinkled with pieces of color fiction and more of the computer generated artwork that made the *a|state* rule book stand out. Unfortunately, the rest of the artwork does not equal this high standard, and to be fair, while Gregor Hutton's cartography is excellent, his illustrations are less so.

Ghostfighter does several things, the first of which is discussing the role of this character type in the party, whether as the Killer or Professional, or having a common cause or being partners in crime. Slang common among the ghostfighter fraternity, known as the Patter, is listed, as is a summary of the character creation rules from the core rulebook. It also explains why certain skills and advantages are useful to the ghostfighter, with new rules detailing thrown weapons; new skills covering the use of the garrote, the quickdraw of weapons, and even base jumping; and new advantages that can be purchased during play. Of the latter, the Combat Advantage is particularly important to the ghostfighter. They include Two Weapons fighting, Unarmed Parry (and counterstrike), and Weapon Parry with one weapon; it is suggested that a player character be allowed just the one. A ghostfighter can also study a Fighting Style, of which two are known and taught in The City, both involving the use of the knife or Llife and its variants. "Markain" is predicated on overwhelming offence, while "Demeloque" concentrates on defense. Finding a master to teach either could easily become an in-game objective for a player character ghostfighter.

New gear includes a variety of weapons: two variations in size and reach of the standard Llife (the Half Llive and the Long Llife), as well as the boatman's hook, the garrote, and several throwing weapons. Combat drugs can temporarily enhance a ghostfighter's senses, agility and dexterity, or strength and speed, as well as dulling pain sensors, though all

three pills have dehabilitating effects or horrendous side effects if abused.

In keeping with the style of the game, no statistics are given for The City's famous ghostfighters, but they can be matched with the supplement's templates. There are five of these character templates, each with a description and a ready-to-use character sheet. They are, in turn, the Bodyguard; the Fallen Angel, who has given up her religious upbringing to become an itinerant knife-for-hire; and the Perfectionist, a highly skilled practitioner of the perfect kill. The Pit Fighter fights for money, fame, and the adulation of the crowds, while the Radge is young, lawless, an on the edge punk, whose destiny is either dead in an alley, or learning to overcome his excesses. The supplement is rounded out with a new character sheet and an equipment list.

Ghostfighter is welcome support for *a/state,* throwing light upon a character type that can be otherwise be difficult for the GM or player to both define and portray. In doing so, it adds more to this one aspect of the game rather than adding to the game as a whole, but of course it was never designed to do more than this. It also sets a decent standard for the future supplements that will expand upon other character types, such as the lostfinder and the flowghost. Overall, there are no downsides to this supplement, making *Ghostfighter* the start of a useful little series.

--Matthew Pook

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Four Games I'd Buy Again

I'm still hacking away at a deadline that's wearing a gray cloak and carrying a scythe, so I don't have much time this week to devote to my column. (Or, to paraphrase Mark Twain, "I wrote you a long colum because I didn't have the time to write a short one . . .")

Anyway, on a plethora of newsgroups for the various genres I'm interested in, one of the things I've seen in recent weeks has been lists of "Stuff They Should Bring Back" -- computer games they should make sequels to, comics they should revive, and so on. This seems like a really easy column idea to crank out, so I'm presenting a list of four RPGs I'd like to see come back in some form. Three of them are licenses, but such is the nature of the beast. Note that I make no claim as to these being my most-wanted nonexistant RPGs, mostly because I'm sure someone will come up with an e-mail or message board post saying, "What about long-out-of-print Game X?" to which I'll reply, "Heck, yeah! I loved that game!"

I've tried to limit myself to games that (to the best of my knowledge) aren't being actively supported, nor are there any plans to support them. (So, for example, while I might love to see a full scale-up re-envisioning of *In Nomine,* the fact that the game is still being supported in its old incarnation means I won't be mentioning that one. Err . . . except for here. But it's a parenthetical aside, so it doesn't count.) I'm also leaving off-limits games whose status is, best I can tell, in limbo -- sorry, *Star Wars, Star Trek,* and *Lord of the Rings.* I'm also keeping off-limits games that *have* been revised, but whose revisions I just don't care for. For example, while I'd love to see a return to the 1980's FASERIP *Marvel Super-Heroes* RPG or the Mayfair *DC Heroes* game, both of those licenses have spawned at least one RPG after their demise, and (to the best of my knowledge) there have been almost no examples of games going back to previous systems after trying to convert over. (This also means that I need to shunt to a parenthetical aside my opining for the TSR version of the *Indiana Jones RPG,* which was an awful game but had those wonderful cardboard props.)

We have the ground rules? Is the column half-written already? Have I bought myself a few minutes to poke the Grim Reaper of Deadlines with a pen? Good; let's begin!

1) *Doctor Who* -- Yes, I know there was the pretty-darn-neat *Time Lords* RPG a while ago written by Ian Marsh (no relation), but the paper version of that one came out in 1991 and the freeware electronic version came out in 1996 (available somewhere via http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/ianmcdonald/who-rpg/, if you're curious).

The interesting thing about the *Doctor Who* license is that it's one of the few "time travel" games that actually has a decent shot at working as an RPG . . . mostly because all instances of "time travel" are usually kept in quotes to indicate a ("Okay; we're going to the Dawn of Time tomorrow! Next week, futzing around in King Arthur's court. The week after, lizard men!") Really, if you think about it, both *Doctor Who* and the original *Star Trek* dipped into the time-travel well for actual story fodder about the same amount of time, and the rest of the time they tended to fight latex monsters and robots.

Anyway, given the recent rekindling of *Doctor Who* as a well-received television show, now would be a perfectly snazzy time for a new RPG to see the light of day.

2) *The Prisoner* -- Sadly, whatever company would do this one would need to contend itself with the idea that it's never gonna be a giga-jillion seller. However, other niche properties have done pretty well, including *Red Dwarf* and others I'm too lazy to look up right now. Heck, the trading card market (non-CCGs, that is) has quite a number of companies who do well keeping coming out with product for relatively small licenses. Of course, it's probably easier to slap some stock photos onto cardstock than it is to come up with a 256-page hardcover, but that's beside the point.

Where was I? Ah, yes. *The Prisoner.* This classic cult show has been out of print in an RPG form for 15 years (or, as I like to think of it, "almost half my life"), when *GURPS Prisoner* saw print. Of course, with modern survailance techniques, issues of privacy, and the omnipresence of computers epochs beyond what the original series envisioned, the underlying issues are as relevant as ever.

Ideally such a book would contain advice and settings for various levels of play: "pure" 1960s-style espionage gaming, a modern-era *Prisoner* campaign, and perhaps advice for amalgamating the two (as has been done in recent novels).

3) An Immortal Set for *Dungeons & Dragons* -- I originally wrote about *Spelljammer* here, but *Spelljammer* has a really vibrant fan community and the *Immortal Rules* don't. Curiously, both *Spelljammer* and the original gold-box *Immortal Rules* for the No-Prefix *Dungeons & Dragons* game were responsible for my most mind-blowing gaming moments as a child ("How can you throw an apple into an orbit around a ship?! What does it mean that nightmares exist in the third, fourth, and fifth dimensions?!?"). I loved *Spelljammer* more primarily because I could understand it, but the *Immortal Rules* haven't seen an update since the admittedly superlative Aaron-Allston-scribed *Wrath of the Immortals* boxed set from the early 1990s.

4) *Ghostbusters* -- Finally, wrapping up my trip down nostalgia lane, I'd love to see another version of the *Ghostbusters* RPG. This game seems to beg for a Twilight Creations Inc.-style *When Darkness Comes . . .* boardgame/RPG combination treatment. This is one of the most timeless humorous licenses to come out in the past couple of decades, and I suspect many good games could come from its respawning. (Hey, they came out with new *Army of Darkness* stuff . . . how long can it be before this one comes back?)

As an aside, one of the earliest non-*Dungeons & Dragons* adventures I remember reading as a kid was *Ghost Toasties,* the adventure that came with the *Ghostbusters* screen. Know who co-wrote that one? None other than SJGames' own Scott Haring (who was, of course, the pulsing brain behind *Pyramid* for many, many years). Small world.

Anyway, there's my off-the-cuff list of four. Hopefully I haven't named any that are in development but for which I missed the press release. And hopefully one or more of these will be under my tree next Christmas.

--Steven Marsh

Oppidian Horsepower

by Eric Funk

The Energy Crisis

On this mildly alternate world, as humanity approached the end of the first decade of the 21st century, gasoline prices began to double every year. Hybrid cars were manufactured at an alarming rate to meet this gap, but could not match it. As more and more people turned to mass transit and bicycles, companies began to invest in hydrogen fuel cells for their trucks and busses. These conversions proved so successful (and inexpensive in the long view of rising gas prices) that most heavy vehicles were converted within the decade. Due to the bulk and startup cost, these motors are unsuitable for cars and small trucks. Seeing this trouble dawning, the governments reserved the alcohol fuel and "biodiesel" for military use and for emergency vehicles (ambulance, fire, and high-performance police pursuit operations). Another technology springing back is the use of plant oil as diesel fuel. This was first experimented in World War II, and is being used as a fuel supplement (about 10%) in some agricultural cities circa 2005.

Some more exotic fuels were tried in small towns. A few include methane, potatoes, processed waste, and re-burning wood smoke. Few of these met with much success, but some of the pilot vehicles and plants are still around. Electric cars are not found due to the "public knowledge" of their low speeds and unstable small tanks. They were forbidden due to deeply implanted laws sponsored by gas consortiums to prevent home generation of hydrogen (e.g. requirements that cars be mainly powered by a combustion engine). Thus the large car companies were caught unprepared for the crisis, and many folded. The survivors concentrated on their government and military contracts. Airline companies re-invented the [zeppelin](), and cheap flights are possible at modest speeds. Some use combination helium-hydrogen lift bags so the hydrogen bag can be burned as fuel.

Local production of power including solar, wind, and water generators have kept consumer electricity prices from skyrocketing. Water and electricity prices are higher than in 2010, but still barely affordable. Many licensed companies sell power back to the grid with their own resevoirs, collecting rain water for drinking (or plumbing) and making hydrogen. Money can be saved by cracking the hydrogen during the night when power is cheaper and running their hydrogen fuel cells during the day. Others buy hydrogen wholesale and burn it during the day. The rain water also helps cut down on water bill. This investment can be profitable; larger companies usually have larger roofs. Companies in polluted areas can even use the acid rain to their advantage by chemically extracting the hydrogen from the acid. Some warehouses also make a good profit selling the hydrogen for vehicles. Others give over large rooms over to allowing water exhaust to condense and be recycled. This allows many large companies to add saunas to their recreational facilities, and providing steam for hot water heaters and winter heating.

Urbania

Mass-transit vehicles in most cities use middle and large fuel cell-powered busses or electric trains. Poorer areas (and many routers replacing small busses) use horse-drawn trailers (with manual brakes). Most towns sport "public cycle" programs, with generic 10-speed bicycles available for public use. The downtown core of most cities have changed little. They usually have a rail system and a large number of buses. Most outdoor parking lots become fields, covered parking garages, and stables. (The byproducts are sold as fertilizer as part of the "contract" of using the facility.) Most of society is at late TL8, with early TL9 energy production (but no superscience power cells or fusion power yet). Most cities by now have a Farrier's Guild, which still teaches by apprenticeship; they hold a virtual monopoly on shoeing horses.

Not everyone will own or use a horse. One limit is the food required for horses (about 15 acres of farmland, or 1.2 acres of grazing each). The second is the space requirements for keeping horses in general. Finally, mass transit and telecommuting mean that personal mid-range transport isn't as neccessary as it once was. Some companies offer "horse clubs" that let one borrow a horse at any branch in the city and return it at any location. Most horses are trained to

return to a bonded pen if left unattended for a while, although some companies embed GPS transponders in their tackle to enable them to find the mount after a time of being left alone. One can even have a horse delivered for rent in the morning (if one has a pole and feed ready). It can be taken to the office, and dropped off in a "pool" for the company to take care of; then one can pick another from the pool, return home, and the horse will be picked up. Most people ride the horses, while other have carriages (with heating and air conditioning powered by generators on the axles) or boxes for children. A great many simply call a hansom cab or ride a bus.

Animal cruelty laws still prevent abuse of horses, making it forbidden to tie them up without water or food for extended periods of time. A controversial topic is the use of blinders on horses; while they help keep the animal focused in traffic, they also may get into collisions they might have instinctively avoided.

Culture

Popular culture has embraced this new mode of transport. The "cool" crowd has polished horseshoes, tackle, and brand-name riding gear. The picture of a successful businessman is a man in a business suit riding a horse with cell phone in hand. Throwing horseshoes is a common sport, with competing lines (and styles) of plastic horseshoes for children to throw. The purchase price of a standard riding horse is about $5,000 (saddle and tack not included). Rental for 24h: ~$60 (less on weekends). Rental just during business hours: ~$40.

A few ads include:

- "Ride low and it will keep you warm in the winter."
- "In Summer, plan ahead and ride into the breeze."
- "Specially bred horses can eat different qualities of feed, so none of the grain is wasted. Know what your horse needs so they get enough nutrients and not too many!"

Adventure Seeds and Ideas

Lobbying for the Horseless Carriage: A riot breaks out around the PCs, demanding that they help protest the legislation of completely electric cars.

Horse Doctors: The huge demand for equestrian transport is still ahead of veterinary capabilities at all stages of life. Thus some breeders are pumping out horses in large-scale "puppy mills" in unsanitary conditions. The heroes are asked to investigate by concerned citizens. (It may well turn out that the mill has an inside informant in the local government so they clean up minimally at the last moment; if so, are the heroes prepared to fight the government for justice?)

Horse Hockey: This sport involving horses wearing horseshoes with cleats came into being during years of consecutive lockouts and strikes of the professional hockey leagues. Competition is no less fierce, even between the fans.

Horse Thieves: The adventurers catch some youths breaking into a stable. If caught, they claim to be paid by someone who matches the description of the party's current contact in this city. The youth should escape before police can arrive, requiring further investigation.

Horse Whisperer: A woman is making rounds, claiming to be able to talk to horses (or a primal horse spirit, if talking to horses is mundane), and can diagnose what is wrong with the animals. This is gaining her great influence and prestige. Is she for real, or is she adept at veterinary science and body language (horse and human)?

Horse Sense: In a high-biotech, secret-magic, or mad-science-friendly campaign setting (such as Supers), adventurers may face a foe that is using some sort of mind-control to abduct riders while on their horses or prevent mounted pursuit.

Shoe-In: A small town the team is passing through has an opening for a farrier. There are people desperate for

someone to shoe their horses; if any of the party is qualified and has mercy, making shoes for a few desperate souls, then they and the rest will make it hard to leave. If so, they may well have to deal with the Farrier's Guild demanding union dues, yet not showing any interest in sending a replacement. (Alternatively, the town might have a farrier, but the Guild refuses to replace him, or examine his skills. Woe be to anyone dependant on that guilder's craft in a tight situation . . .)

Variants

Autoduel: In a one-horse town, the man with the car is king. Even criminals on humble motorcycles would have the speed advantage when trying to escape. Of course, refueling will cost a lot more, requiring more daring deeds to acquire money . . .

Infinite Worlds: Approximately two seconds behind Homeline, this parallel is technologically behind by one step from "normal" in almost every way. This world, designated "Hippodrome," is Open for travel. Under White Star's careful investment, local researchers are getting closer to solving the energy crisis. Tourism brings a lot of people interested in horses, and too many that are trying to "invent" new power sources.

Space/Infinite Worlds: One world among many, it is proceeding nicely toward the next TL. Many citizens will be content to wait until a clean power source is available (considering the energy cost of importing petroleum).

Today: As a not-too-weird exotic locale for any modern setting, a modern government (such as a county or small country) can get tired of rising gas prices. This setting can be used as presented, but without the fuel cells.

Pyramid Resources

- *"Animal Vessels in **GURPS In Nomine**"* by Elizabeth McCoy
- "Compleat Familiar" by Anthony Jackson
- "Horse Sense" by S. E. Mortimer
- Shadow Steeds" by Elizabeth McCoy

Gunpowder Empires

Military Parallels among the Infinite Worlds

by Michael Daumen

An *Infinite Worlds* campaign based on the exploits of Alternate Outcomes allows for the derring-do of military action. Such a game is clearly designed to include adventures revolving around historical battles of our past that many players will recognize. It is often difficult to appease history buffs who may object to particular characterizations of the leaders and tactics of such engagements. On the other end of the spectrum, not all players may derive the same enjoyment from dealing with the minutiae of a little-known conflict.

For times then a GM may not want to foist (or risk) a history lesson on PCs in the Battalion, here are three parallels with a decidedly martial bent. They include the possibility of large-scale warfare involving many nations and forces. In each one, comparatively very little time has passed since the divergence points, so they retain familiarity while either prolonging old wars or generating new ones. The conflicts are designed to be near-global in scope, so realistically only "modern" tech levels from 5 to 7 are involved. Confrontations among combatants with lower TLs tend to be regional affairs.

Outworld Operations

On these worlds, the Infinity Council's official position is that they don't know where to start. It is difficult for any expert to predict with reliability how to untangle conflicts that sprawl across continents. A GM is more than free to combine an interesting locale with an interesting objective and let the party loose, without worrying too much about the results of the operation. And since these parallels are all lie within Quanta 6 or 7, infiltration by Centrum agents is always a useful possibility.

Because of the dangers of collateral damage in worlds like these, tourists generally avoid them, although travel to them is not restricted outright. Most spectators prefer earlier times, content to watch the clash of steel from a picnic blanket and safe vantage point in the time-honored Medieval fashion.

Finally, two of the parallels have alternate names, depending on whether the GM wants to emphasize the relevant facets of these worlds, or surprise the players instead.

Guayaquil/Napoleon-8, A.D. 1837

The change point of Guayaquil occurs on the island of St. Helena in 1820, where a plot to poison Napoleon is thwarted, rather than leading to his death the following May. He is presumed to be too far from Europe to cause alarm; but two men much closer to the exiled Corsican regard his continued existence as a unique opportunity. Their names are Thomas Cochrane, a disgraced Scot now commanding of the Chilean Navy, and Jose de San Martín, veteran of the Peninsular war and leader of a joint Chilean-Argentine army.

They often fail to see eye to eye -- Lord Cochrane in particular decried San Martín's cautious campaign to liberate Chile and coastal Peru, responding with a series of dazzling maneuvers to cripple Spain's Pacific fleet. However, the duo shares the fervent desire to see South America freed from European control, and is willing to sacrifice everything -- even old animosities - towards that end. In early 1822 they approach Bernardo O'Higgins, the director of Chile and a lifelong friend of San Martín, to consider their daring plan, and he reluctantly agrees.

In April, the schooner Mendoza sails from Buenos Aires with a handpicked force of grenadiers, landing unannounced at St. Helena. Before news of the raid reaches London, Bonaparte has left Argentina with 50 veterans of the Army of the Andes. By the time San Martín meets Simon Bolivar in the free port of Guayaquil in late July, to determine the fate

of the last Spanish army in Upper Peru, the one-time emperor of France is a secret addition to the former's staff.

On Homeline, San Martín abdicated his command to Bolivar without a shot fired -- the third refusal of near-absolute power in a remarkable career. But here, instead of placating the Colombian, San Martín has a clear alternative, and he seizes it. A grumbling Bolivar acquiesces, after securing platitudes to democracy and a share of command with the others. By the time Europe can address this crisis, it is 1823 and the Spanish have been routed by the superior tactics of El Corso and his lieutenants.

The Archduchess Marie Louise of Austria, who had declined to follow her husband to St. Helena, is equally scornful of an invitation to South America. Napoleon divorces her in 1824 and marries the sister of Pedro, regent and heir-apparent to a fictional Brazilian crown. With his brother-in-law's assistance, Portuguese troops opposed to turning fiction into reality are driven from Brazil. All the newly independent nations ratify the 1826 Recife accords, uniting the continent into a loose federation and proclaiming South America forever free from European influence.

The federation -- ruled by a weak executive triumvirate of Napoleon, Bolivar, and Pedro -- allows its members to govern itself, largely because it has its hands full. England and Spain desire to renew the offensive, while France is cautiously neutral. The belligerent European posture long flummoxes the United States, whose president never pronounces the doctrine which bears his name.

It is 1837, and the cold war which had endured for a decade has sublimated in the flash of gunpowder. A score of running battles extends the length of the Western Hemisphere, from Indians and Canadians opposing American expansion west and north, to suramericanos checking the advances of the Atlantic Alliance of England, Spain, and Portugal. Independence movements in the provinces of the Yucatan and Coahuilla y Tejas plague the Republic of Mexico. Napoleon has died, and even before his tomb is sealed the Gran Colombians chafe at the suggestion that his son Juan "Napoleonito" ascend to the triumvirate, which already favors the southern cone (Bolivar died in 1830 from tuberculosis, and Pedro in 1834, replaced by Antonio Jose de Sucre and O'Higgins, respectively). If this wedge doesn't drives a continent apart, perhaps the one brewing in the United States will.

Characters visiting Guayaquil can witness the resumption of epic Napoleonic warfare first-hand throughout the Americas. The Age of the Soldier has bloomed anew for a generation in Europe that had known peace. Soldiers can expect anything from battling counterinsurgency in occupied Canada to running guns in French Guiana, as well as traditional set-piece engagements in Mexico and Argentina. And even if the American Civil War doesn't arrive early, plenty of new inventions are on the horizon, promising to transform the waging of war in an instant.

Divergence Point: 1820; Napoleon survives a poisoning plot to play a role at the conference of Guayaquil during the wars for South American independence.
Major Civilizations: Orthodox (empire), Western (multipolar), Chinese (empire)
Great Powers: Confederacion de Suraméica (oligarchy, CR3), United States (representative democracy, CR3), British Empire (representative democracy, CR3), Russian Empire (dictatorship, CR4), Manchu Empire (dictatorship, CR5)

Worldline Data

 TL: 5   **Mana Level:** low   **Quantum:** 6   **Infinity Class:** P5   **Centrum Zone:** Yellow

La-Perouse/Lenin-7, A.D. 1920

After the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, Japan's navy outclassed that of the Russian Empire, and constantly lured the hostile ships into a series of one-sided engagements, culminating in a spectacular victory in the straits of Tsushima. In this parallel, the tsar reins in his enthusiastic admirals until the arrival of the Baltic fleet from its epic journey across three oceans. Most fortunately for them, the commander had decided instead to sail for Vladivostok via the straits of La-Perouse, sacrificing time for safety. Faced with the newly-enlarged enemy, Japanese admiral Togo no longer seeks a decisive engagement, and the stalemate ends with the Treaty of Portsmouth a year later than in our timeline. Russia allows Japan a greater presence in China and emerges essentially without any losses.

Without the devastating defeat that occurs on Homeline, Russia avoids the naval mutinies and disastrous Revolution of 1905. Under the able leadership of prime ministers Witte and Stolypin, the Russian people finally taste the first fruits of democracy. An aborted Bolshevik revolution fails in 1913; Lenin is imprisoned and executed in Ekaterinburg. Still, the Great War breaks out in 1915, despite a diplomatic resolution to the July Crisis of the preceding year.

Russia is in much better shape to fight this time around, and her advances throw Austria-Hungary into disarray, shock the Ottoman Empire into inaction, and convince Germany that the real danger lies eastward. As a result, the Kaiser shelves the Schlieffen plan for a later date, and Britain only enters the war in summer 1916, after France appeals for aid in breaking the stalemate. Leon Trotsky is present in Paris when the French finally give out in 1917, leading British, French, and German troops on a wild chase to quell the unrest he causes.

Three years later, the war continues, largely along the same lines as before. Austria-Hungary and Italy fight a punchless Alpine campaign, while the Turks retreat slowly westward from Russian positions in the Caucasus and British advances in Mesopotamia. They will be the next to quit. As long as Germany can check both Britain and Russia, however, there is no peace in sight. The United States, which remains neutral, ironically dooms itself to the status of a minor power, as the ravages of the Grippe remain confined to American cities once the quarantine goes into effect.

The major powers are still in decent condition to prolong the fight, and barring a major change or domestic upheaval, will do so. The remnants of France with some semblance of autonomy have declared belated neutrality, and as they lie away from the bulk of the fighting Germany and Britain largely ignore them absent rumors that Trotsky may be nearby. The northern chunk of the country, slashed by trenches from the Low Countries to the Massif Central, is administered under German or British martial law, or has reverted to no man's land. Japan is largely a wild-card, having declared war on Germany only and more than content to pick at the pieces of her Pacific colonies. They are steadily expanding in China, and may still be casting greedy eyes at Manchuria and the Russian Far East.

Welcome to World War One, made slightly less grim without the specters of the Russian Revolution, the Spanish flu pandemic, and possibly even Nazi Germany. Characters can engage in trench warfare in Poland or Belgium, guerilla raids with Pancho Villa, T.E. Lawrence or Trotsky, or police actions with the Japanese in warlord-torn China. Naval action between dreadnoughts in the North Sea and aerial combat between Zeppelins and ever-improving biplanes are possibilities as well.

Divergence Point: 1904, Russian ships in the Pacific avoid major engagements with the Japanese until the arrival of the Baltic fleet, lessening the effects of that conflict and transforming the First World War.
Major Civilizations: Orthodox (empire), Japanese (empire), Western (multipolar), Islamic (empire with rivals).
Great Powers: Russian Empire (dictatorship, CR4), British Empire (representative democracy, CR4), United States (representative democracy, CR3), Ottoman Empire (theocracy, CR5), German Empire (dictatorship, CR4), Empire of Japan (feudal, CR4)

Worldline Data

TL: 6   **Mana Level:** low   **Quantum:** 6   **Infinity Class:** P4   **Centrum Zone:** Yellow

Ketsu-Go, A.D. 1962

In our timeline, the USS Indianapolis was sunk on July 30, 1945, having set a speed record across the Pacific in deviation of the standard anti-submarine zig-zag tactics. Although Captain Charles McVay paid the price for his decision, he was able to deliver his cargo to the island of Tinian -- the first atomic bomb. Unfortunately for the inhabitants of Ketsu-Go, the cruiser is still hit by Japanese torpedos even when McVay plays by the book and follows procedure; this time, however, the precious cargo is still aboard. Despite standing orders to save the bomb even at the expense of the crew, Little Boy sinks with a majority of the seamen and marines aboard, and Fat Man does not ravage Hiroshima until August 17. The next bomb is slated for delivery by the end of the year, but not before the invasion of

Japan starts.

Although US casualties in the invasion of Kyushu are horrendous, they are nearly matched by Soviet troops in the invasion of Hokkaido. Soon thereafter, with the bulk of American forces leaving Europe for the Pacific front, Stalin's armies menace Istanbul and northern Iran, securing both rights to the Mediterranean and oil concessions from the shah. The allies hold most of each small island before the second bomb drops, on December 13 over Niigata. This is far enough north to avoid the irradiation of most American forces -- though many have already gotten sick after exposure to the ruins of Hiroshima -- and close enough to the Soviet lines for Stalin to take notice. He acts accordingly, speeding up the USSR's atomic program. Still, Japan surrenders a week later.

The jointly occupied Axis nations are divided, with the new border between North and South Japan running across Honshu. The Soviet Union holds Korea and Manchuria, and eyes the burgeoning civil war in China warily. After the Marshall mission defuses the tension, China is split into a over dozen states, from the rabidly pro-American Sinkiang in the west, to Communist Manchuria and Inner Mongolia and the bursting polities of Kuomintang Taiwan and Guangdong. The detonation of Stalin's first weapon in 1947 seals the deal.

In 1962, a fragile peace is now maintained across a much larger front, although both the United States and the USSR are just as content to wage war through their proxies. Europe suffers, but not under the yoke of the Warsaw Pact; Malenkov must keep his eyes on the East as well as the West. Rather, American aid is much slower in coming, and arrives in smaller parcels. Most of the independent European states are still fierce colonialists, holding on to what resources they can, even as they lack the means to crush the myriad insurrections that have arisen across Africa and southern Asia. The only colony with a degree of independence is the Union of South Africa, whose troops manage the Suez canal under a British mandate; India remains unpacified, and a steady stream of Jews argue for a greater say in Palestine as they jostle with their Arab neighbors.

As long as a weakened Europe seems acceptable to the Soviets, America is content to exercise free rein in its own hemisphere. Just two years ago the CIA toppled the Batista government, replacing him with the Cuban ultranationalist Raul Castro. Every so often, however, Soviet aid gets to the rebels in South America, led by a shadowy Argentine doctor. Perhaps if the Kennedy government sends more than advisors to Brazil they can make some headway in the jungles.

Ketsu-Go is a Cold Warrior's dream, with dozens of localized brushfire wars inflaming the globe. Spies practice the ancient art of espionage in the tottering capitals of Europe and the hastily industrializing cities of the Far East. Independence forces gain momentum as the colonial masters falter in Africa, the Middle East and Indian subcontinent, Indochina and the East Indies. The only real advantage this alternate might have over Homeline is the smaller number of nuclear powers. Both American and Russian troops have witnessed the horrors of nuclear bombardment firsthand in Japan, and a true reluctance to use more offers a certain degree of stability. The secrets of fission are jealously guarded by the US and the Soviets, and anyone with proven access to uranium commands a great deal of attention.

Military characters have their choice of combat zones, from the Sahara across the roof of the world to the sweltering Malay jungles. Idealistic soldiers can help throw off the colonial yoke in India, and mercenaries are always welcome in South Africa's campaigns of conquest. To most citizens of Ketsu-Go, the specter of a mass conventional conflict in Europe and the Far East both a constant threat; to a few others, however, it might be considered an intriguing opportunity.

Divergence Point: 1945; use of the first atomic bomb is delayed, causing World War Two to last for four additional months.
Major Civilizations: Western (empire with rivals), Orthodox (empire with satellite states), Chinese (diffuse).
Great Powers: United States (representative democracy, CR 4), Soviet Union (dictatorship, CR5), Union of South Africa (oligarchy, CR3 for whites, 6 for non-whites)

Worldline Data

 TL: low 7   **Mana Level:** low   **Quantum:** 7   **Infinity Class:** R5   **Centrum Zone:** Orange

Pyramid Pick

Shadows Over Camelot

Published by [Days of Wonder](#)

Designed by Bruno Cathala & Serge Laget

Illustrated by Julien Delval

Four game boards (three double-sided), 16 swords, 168 cards, seven "coats of arms" (character sheets), eight dice, two booklets (rules and quests), & 30 miniatures; three to seven players, full-color, boxed; $49.95

Camelot has fallen several times over the years, in many ways and in many guises, but one thing seems certain…it always falls. This time it's not a forgone conclusion -- you and your friends have the opportunity to achieve a happy ending for the mythical kingdom in *Shadows Over Camelot* -- but that doesn't mean it's going to be easy.

The object of the game is to finish the game with more white swords than black laid across the legendary Round Table.

Three to seven players take the role of King Arthur or one of his famed knights; each has a card that lists important game information and a unique special ability. Everyone starts at the round table where they can gather white cards for their hand. These help you fight, go on quests, and call upon the services of Merlin and others. Each turn you have to give evil a chance to progress: draw a black card, allow a siege engine to muster in the fields beyond the castle, or lose a life point.

Once the bad guys have made inroads, you may take a heroic action; you can draw or play cards, attempt to destroy a siege engine, or go on a quest. Quests include battling the Black Knight, seeking the Grail or Excalibur, or fighting Picts and Saxons, among others. Too many siege engines, and Camelot succumbs. Forge your way through a quest and you stand to gain white swords, life points, and white cards. Fail, and the black swords will do the siege engines' job for them.

Most quests involve the play of cards. Gaining the Grail, for example, means drawing enough Grail cards to stretch across a track printed on one of the maps. If you draw an opposing card from the black deck, though, you'll have to play additional Grails to get rid of those before you can finish the quest. Challenging the Black Knight requires you to play two pairs of matched cards before he becomes too powerful, and fighting off invading armies require a "straight." Mechanics aside, there's plenty of flavor -- all the important notables, historical and otherwise, make an appearance, from Lancelot to Morgan to dragons.

Some journeys must be undertaken alone (the Black Knight), while others benefit from multiple participants. Using cards can be like Bridge: You want others to benefit mutually from your plays, but you can't just tell people what you have that might solve the current quest. The cooperation factor is key here, making it one of the few games where you won't even notice you haven't hit your friends with anything all session long. Work together with your cards and abilities and survive; argue, and it seriously impairs your chances for glory. Then once you think you've got a grip on those rules, introduce the possibility of a traitor in the ranks and it becomes a whole other game.

There's a king's ransom of components with this game, and Days of Wonder makes sure they count. Some sections, like the main board, get a little crowded (there are spaces for the black and white decks, oddly, but not their discards), but you wouldn't want to cover up any of that gorgeous artwork. The cards are good stock, the dice are wooden, and all

the boards are firm, mounted masterworks of both material and illustration. And the figurines? Yes, you'd gladly pay serious money for those, and they only paint the heroes' bases. (The company offers a fully painted set of heroes separately.)

In this busy game there's always something to do, and the beautiful thing is it's not too hard to keep all the ongoing plots straight. You're never bored, and never sure of victory. Sacrifice is a meaningful part of the game's inner workings. Threats hem you in on all sides, keeping tension at a steady level no matter how many quests you complete. Sure, it all seems overwhelming, but in a fun way, and from your first game it's possible to see how all the threads interconnect. Somewhere out there is a playtesting group that is sick of the sight of this box, and their wounds are a boon for you and your group…you're going to end up playing this as much as they did.

Be prepared to sit down to a dining table full of Sieges Perilous. Perhaps the richest simulation of Camelot ever, the wondrous, intricate, challenging tapestry presented here is so well-balanced it bears playing again and again. Better still, in spite of its breadth and depth, it's not an imposingly long game you could play twice in a single evening. With **Shadows Over Camelot,** the fabled storybook tale is in good hands: the designers', and yours.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

The Imp Game

Published by [Neo Productions Unlimited](#)

Written by Nate Petersen

Cover by Calvin W.Camp

31-Page 677 KB PDF File; $5

Think *[My Life With Master](#)* by way of **Toon, *[Rune](#)*** and **Kobolds Ate My Baby,** and you pretty much sum up ***The Imp Game.*** Reminiscent of the *Dungeon Keeper* PC Game, this is a beer 'n' pretzels game in which the players assume the roles of Imps, the incompetent, bumbling-but-usually-willing minions of the "Master." Happy (mostly), to undertake the tasks he assigns them, or wheedle and whine their way though an excuse or two if not. Being sidekicks of course, the Imps are prone to failure, and fail they do loudly and often. Yet once in a while an Imp might succeed and thus earn the much-desired praise of their master.

The Imp Game is much like ***Rune,*** in that it is collaborative in nature, with the roles of both player and GM changing places over the course of an adventure. The GM is there to set the scene, keep the story moving, and to prevent any abuse of the GM's mechanics. Yet he also has his own Imp character that he plays like the other players. Further any player is free to add elements to the game -- NPCs, Locations, and so on, as long as they fit the game and add to the enjoyment of the play.

In keeping with the simplicity of the game, defining each Imp is a very easy task. Every Imp has a class, which represents what it is good at. Each class is categorized along typical roleplaying attributes -- strength, intelligence, charisma, and so on. Thus a Big Dumb Imp is strong, and better at picking things up or pushing them around, while a Devious Imp is relatively charming (for an Imp!) and is quite capable of getting what it wants. There is also the Crazy Imp, whose key attribute varies from one task to the next. One moment it might be the equivalent of a Big Dumb Imp or a Smart Imp or even suffer a bout of Common Sense, an attribute that only a Crazy Imp has access to! Every time a Crazy Imp attempts an action it has to roll to see which attribute it can use.

In addition an Imp has three traits, such as Clumsy, Curiosity, Kleptomaniac, or Pacifist. A player selects two, while the group chooses the third. A trait is a roleplaying tag, one that a player has to roleplay, and everyone else will find a way to take advantage of. Likewise, an Imp has one Fear selected by his player, and another assigned by the group. A Fear can also be taken advantage of by the other players, and can be anything uncommon, such as a fear of anything purple, or bunnies or sheets or sausages.

Particular to each Imp is a special ability such as being able to animate his badly drawn artwork, Fire Breathing, Hypnotism or even Imp Magick. The latter is a simple affair, spontaneous and invariably unwieldy and unpredictable. It can be used to temporarily replicate any of the listed abilities. All abilities need to make a successful challenge check to work, but can be raised from rank 0 to rank 2. Each additional rank provides a small modifier to a challenge check roll. Finally, an Imp's player begins with 10 poker chips.

The mechanics in ***The Imp Game*** support its need for frequent failure results. It uses two six-sided dice, rolled any time an Imp needs to make a challenge check. The target number for this roll varies, but is always the same for all of the players, the aim being to roll equal to or under the target number. At game start, the target number is two. If the roll fails, the target number rises by one, making the target number for the next challenge check for any of the players a three. It can be raised temporarily by an Imp expending one or two Guts Points, represented by the poker chips. Any

Guts Points so invested are lost if the challenge check fails, but if it succeeds, an Imp recovers Guts Points equal to the roll. The target number also resets itself back down to two. In event of a failed roll, the player is expected to narrate the effects of his Imp's failure, as he would a success.

Besides being spent on raising target numbers, Guts Points can be used to activate another Imp's traits. For example one Imp might force another Imp with the Eager Trait to volunteer to undertake an unpleasant task, or a Know-It-All Imp to land himself in trouble by revealing too much. In addition, any Gut Points over ten at the end of the turn, become Praise Points, which represent the approval, doled out by the Imp's master after a successfully completed task. The group can also award Praise Points to a player for enjoyable play. Saved over the course of several adventures, Praise Points can be spent to purchase new abilities, raise the rank of an existing one, buy a new trait or get rid of an existing one, or even buy more Guts Points.

Playing *The Imp Game* is designed to be undemanding working as it does in a quasi-medieval world chock full of every cliché going. Imps are generally short, fat, and none too bright, but are eager to please; villagers are equally stupid, are fearful of the Imps, and are easy to deceive, bamboozle, or beat up. And of course, Adventurers are the stars of the show. Popular, intelligent (in comparison), better armed and equipped, they are an Imp's foil, and a bunch of Imps will have to use their abilities to beat any Adventurers. And while all that seems too tough for the Imps, they at least cannot be killed. Suffer pain, and lots of it, but not killed.

Physically, *The Imp Game* is presented as simply as the game is played. The only illustration is the cover, but this does not detract from the game, which is clearly written and easy to grasp. It comes with 13 scenario suggestions, which range from kidnapping a princess and stopping a gallant knight from rescuing her, to hiring more monsters to populate the master's dungeon and breaking up a strike by the monsters in the dungeon.

Mechanically simple, it is these mechanics that drives the failure/success dichotomy in *The Imp Game.* The players are encouraged to fail -- and fail often because only that will increase the chance of a success. To enforce the fact that failure is not seen as such, it is also up to the player to narrate its outcome. The point is that an Imp's failure should be as enjoyable as its successes. Such simple mechanics are of course open to abuse, but this is where the GM is needed, and anyway, the game is hardly intended for deep, serious play. What *The Imp Game* is, is a light, undemanding affair, suited to occasional play, especially when the GM wants a night off.

--Matthew Pook

Absinthe and Sensibility

"After the first glass, you see things as you wish they were. After the second, you see things as they are not. Finally, you see things as they really are, and that is the most horrible thing in the world."
-- Oscar Wilde

It is the fondest dream of this column to see things as we wish they were. So one glass it is. Of course, we wouldn't be able to get very far with that project if we didn't see things as they are not. So a second glass for us, then. But the third glass -- do we drink it? Have we already drunk it? And who is the lady in emerald and opal to whose honor we drink, and would that really be the most horrible thing in the world? Raise your glass and look into the green.

"Green changed to white, emerald to an opal: nothing was changed.
The man let the water trickle gently into his glass, and as the green clouded, a mist fell from his mind.
Then he drank opaline.
Memories and terrors beset him. The past tore after him like a panther and through the blackness of the present he saw the luminous tiger eyes of the things to be."
-- Ernest Dowson, "Absinthia Taetra"

Under the Second Empire of Napoleon III, the time between work and dinner was *l'heure verte,* "the green hour." Fashionable Paris drank a glass of opalescent green absinthe to "switch off" after a hard day of millinery or novel-writing, almost as a ritual to begin the evening and its pleasures. And drinking absinthe was a ritual, to be sure, involving some iteration of special glassware, sugar cubes, an ornately slotted spoon, and iced water -- all of which tended to keep it a safely upper-middle-class beverage. This despite its social origins as the unofficial tipple of the French colonial army, which issued absinthe as a febrifuge in Algeria in the wars of the 1840s. (The line between specialty liquor and health tonic was fuzzier in those pre-NyQuil days.) But apparently, enough of the officer class enjoyed a dalliance with *La Fée Verte,* the "Green Fairy," to let absinthe jump up to the fashionable boulangeries and cafés of Paris and Marseilles. But it didn't jump all the way up. It kept a certain notoriety as a vice all its own, and it gained a special allure as a drink of more than usual qualities. And its notoriety and allure fed each other, and drew the artistic and the pseudo-artistic alike into the green.

"Do you know what it is like to be haunted by colors? To me, in the color [green](), there is something like the temptation of the devil."
-- Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec

Edgar Allan [Poe]() drank absinthe, though not much. Poe's worshipper Baudelaire drank more, but renounced it by age twenty. Baudelaire's disciple Verlaine nearly died of it, and Verlaine's acolyte Rimbaud only escaped it by fleeing France altogether. Oscar Wilde turned to it in French exile. Alfred Jarry attempted to live on it, using it to fuse hallucination and perception, to abolish days and nights. Manet and Degas roiled the painterly world with their portraits of absinthe drinkers, and became only the first flares of absinthism in French art galleries. Gaugin and Picasso both drank it, and Toulouse-Lautrec and Van Gogh consumed it in vast quantities. (Barnaby Conrad III's *Absinthe: History in a Bottle* provides a superb "who's who" of absintheurs, and a colorful gallery of absinthiated art as well.) To all of these artists absinthe was more than a beverage, it was a symbol of -- or perhaps an initiation into -- [Bohemia](), the shadow world of art, magic, and rebellion. Absinthe was the communion to a new religion; the poet Ernest Dowson went so far as to dangle a crucifix in his absinthe before drinking it. The Green Fairy was less and less metaphorical, and more and more a constant presence. She became the subject of poems and portraits alike, the spirit of the age sidling toward Montmartre to be born.

"I am only sipping the second glass of that 'fascinating, but subtle poison, whose ravages eat men's heart and brain' that I have ever tasted in my life; and as I am not an American anxious for quick action, I am not surprised and disappointed that I do not drop dead upon the spot."
-- Aleister Crowley, "The Green Goddess"

But tying absinthe so fervently to revolution and sin had a cost. As the Third Republic continued to come apart at the

seams, all corners of society from monarchists to communists were looking for a scapegoat, and absinthe was it. Absinthe became the whipping girl for everything from the falling birthrate to military unpreparedness to street crime to that crazy Erik Satie music those kids liked these days. And even if it could have withstood an absinthe-besotted Paul Verlaine attacking his mother, or the sensational "Absinthe Murder" of 1905, it couldn't withstand its fall from bourgeois grace. After the Commune and the fall of the Emperor shook Paris society apart in 1870 -- and more especially after the phylloxera blights of the 1870s and 1880s raised the price of decent wine -- absinthe returned to the working man. Bottlers made more, and cheaper versions of the stuff, replacing the grape alcohol with industrial alcohol. Like gin in the 1730s or marijuana in the 1930s, absinthe was the drug of choice for the lower classes, and therefore found itself increasingly blamed for poverty and moral decay. Which meant only one thing -- it had to be banned. And so it was, in its birthplace Switzerland in 1906, in the United States in 1912, and in France in 1915.

Both anti-absinthe doctors and pro-absinthe poetasters claim that absinthe is special, different, somehow "worse" or "better" or both than other drinks. And indeed, what makes absinthe absinthe is the presence of wormwood, Artemisia absinthium, the second-bitterest plant known to nature, in the mix along with fennel, melissa, hyssop, and the anise that gives absinthe much of its taste. The active ingredient in wormwood is thujone, a terpene similar to menthol or camphor. (Hippies used to say that thujone and THC affected the brain similarly. Not so.) In sufficient quantities, thujone is a convulsant poison that some doctors have found produces hallucinogenic effects. It's those "sufficient quantities" that get you, though -- those convulsing, hallucinating guinea pigs get pure, injected thujone at 100 ml per kilogram of body weight. By contrast, the dose of thujone in a glass of Toulouse-Lautrec's Pernod Fils probably topped out at around a millionth of that, since even Toulouse-Lautrec was bigger than a guinea pig. The majority of research indicates that there is no chemical way for the minuscule amount of thujone in absinthe (averaging around 60 parts-per-million in the Belle Epoque) to cause hallucinations, to say nothing of madness. And certainly my own research bears that out; absinthe gives you a strange "awake" feeling, and gives me, at least, a hyper-sensibility of touch, but no "trails" or lizards or urge to shoot Paul Verlaine. (The stuff I was testing was King of Spirits Gold, an extremely potent Czech brand with a technically illegal 100 ppm thujone content. I give heart and soul for this column.) What far more likely did for Verlaine and van Gogh and Toulouse-Lautrec was the punishing alcohol content of absinthe, which ranges from the mild stuff at 120 proof up to 164 proof for the "Suisse" variety. In a nation of wine-drinkers, absinthe is just too much alcohol in too small a glass. The "speedball" effect -- think vodka and Red Bull -- in which the thujone keeps you weirdly sober while the alcohol goes to work on your central nervous system, doesn't help.

"For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil: But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell."
-- Proverbs 5:3-5

Although the invention of absinthe per se had to wait for the discovery of distillation, wormwood elixir goes back to ancient Egypt as medicine (prescribed for, of course, worms in a papyrus of 1600 B.C.) and ancient Greece as occasional recreational (or religious) beverage. (Artemisia was, of course, offered to Artemis, from whence it came.) The Greeks gave us their name for wormwood, *apsinthion,* which sadly apparently does not mean "undrinkable." The Greek word interestingly resembles the Old Persian word for wormwood, *asfand,* which might be cognate with the Indo-European root *-spend* meaning "offering" or "ritual." Hmmm. Our word "wormwood" comes from the Anglo-Saxon *wermod,* which comes from nowhere that linguists agree on. (I suggest *weir-* "twisted" and *mod* "mind, spirit.") The connection with worms -- with wyrms -- is well established in myth and folklore, though not in linguistics.

Going back to the Egyptians, wormwood and worms have been linked, and herbals ever since have done likewise. An early Christian legend holds that wormwood grew in the tracks of the serpent as it left the Garden of Eden -- whether evil post-Adamic demon seed or valiant plant guardian is left murky. Wormwood shows up in the Bible a number of places, most notably in Greek in the Book of Revelation, in which the "star called wormwood" falls and turns a third of the earth's waters bitter. (Although *chernobyl* is apparently Russian for mugwort, a close relative of wormwood, and not the true herb, the parallel is still kind of creepy.) In Hebrew, wormwood is *la'anah,* which kabbalistically adds to 155, the value of Elemiah, the angel of Inward Journeys, and is just one less than "viper," which is the wyrm turning back around.

"Salon, Mausole, Tarascon of the arch of Sextus
Where the Pyramid still stands

They come to deliver the Prince of Denmark
Offering and shame at the temple Artemisia."
-- Nostradamus, Century IV:27

Similarly snakily, the Pernod absinthe plant moved to Tarragona, Spain (where absinthe was never banned) in 1918. The herb tarragon, of course, is Artemisia dracunculus, the "little dragon," and a close cousin of wormwood. Similarly draconic names dot the shores of the Gulf of Lyon, including Tarascon in France, home to the monstrous Tarrasque. This dragon (or wolf) rose out of the river Rhône and devastated the landscape until tamed by St. Martha with a chalice of water, although there's no mention of sugar cubes or slotted spoons in her legend. But there is the other French river dragon, the Vouivre, which flies in streaks across the sky (like the "star wormwood") and dwells in the Alpine rivers, especially the Loue. (That, at least, is where Marcel Aymé put her in his novel.) The Vouivre is female, half woman, half snake -- a winged Lamia, a spirit of poisoned drink.

And when we see a reference to both Tarascon and Artemisia in Nostradamus' quatrain above, we begin to look askance at the other bits. (Nostradamus, steeping unknown herbs in water for visions.) The "Prince of Denmark" bit is strange, although Hamlet's willingness to "drink eysel" -- wormwood wine -- for Ophelia, drowned in a river with rue, becomes newly alarming. And when we read that the "Mausole" refers not to the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus (built by a grieving Queen Artemisia, I'll note) but to the town of St.-Paul-de-Mausole in the Rhône valley, we prick up our ears. And then we further discover that Vincent van Gogh was confined in the mental asylum at Mausole in 1890, in the grip of absinthism, and that he died in late July, just before the wormwood came into flower. (He was buried under a thujone tree, to boot.) We begin to see the hints of the "offering and shame," and of the trail of the wyrm-wode, the Green Fairy, the vampire Lamia who preys on artists. Perhaps Dowson had other reasons to dip a crucifix in his absinthe.

"Ice thawed by currents from the south
Swell the swift streams beneath,
So when the water out of your mouth
Rises against your teeth,

I seem to drink Bohemian wine
Victorious, bitter, and tart,
A liquid sky strews sublime
Stars across my heart."
-- Charles Baudelaire, "The Dancing Serpent"

The Vouivre is also known, in the Franche-Comte, snug up against the Val de Travers in Switzerland where absinthe was invented, as "Tante Arie," and she lives in an underground stream beneath the mountain, where she spins the fate of the world. Her stream, the Loue River, was born from the blood spilled between a female wolf (*la louve*) and the Vouivre -- shades of our wolf-dragon in the Rhône. The goddess under the mountain, the Aradia or Venus or Berchta or Hecate, we've met before. I'll note, in this connection, that not only the wolf but mugwort (that oh-so-closest relative of wormwood) is sacred to Hecate, and that there was a fane of Hecate in the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus. And Hecate, in early myths, was a mortal priestess who drowned herself and was resurrected by Artemis as a goddess. Drowned and resurrected women, dragons in rivers, streaks of light in the sky, a serpentine Green Fairy (or werewolf woman) who seduces and destroys poets and artists, an "offering" and a "ritual" from the Magi to Montmartre, all connected in the louche mythos of the Artemisia.

Am I reaching? A little too much inspirational research having its effect? Then perhaps it's only a coincidence that on August 11, 1901, during the flowering of Artemisia, during the quinance of Leo assigned to Elemiah, Angel of Inward Turnings, the Pernod plant at Pontarlier was struck by "lightning" and exploded in flames. Workers managed to divert the flaming absinthe into the Doubs River, where it flowed under the mountain -- and out into the Loue, where it turned the water green a resurrected three days later, on August 13. A date known to the Romans as Nemoralia, the torchlit feast of Diana -- which is to say the birthday of Artemis. Artemis, reborn in water after a flash of light across the sky; the Vouivre, Lamia, and the Star Wormwood in one. Salut!

Usenet and Other Dinosaurs

This is one of those columns I'm reluctant to write since I always feel like an old fogey whenever I begin something along the lines of "Back in *my* day . . ."

Anyway, back in *my* day we had a source of information that was a constantly updating information source and a discussion medium. It was called "Usenet." Oh, sure, something purporting to be Usenet continues to exist, but it's mostly for the purpose of providing another forum for the infinite spambots to spew their unending garbage.

Now, for those of you unfamiliar, Usenet -- also known as "newsgroups" (and, no, I'm not going to get into the semantics about other things that are called newsgroups . . . for many a year, when most folks were concerned about signing up with newsgroups, they meant Usenet) -- was a worldwide communication protocol that allowed ongoing conversations via . . . well, newsgroups. Newsgroup programs could collect related posts, or sort them by date order, author, size, or the like.

As I'm typing this, I'm realizing I'm not doing a great job of explaining why Usenet was special. I've included a screenshot of the *Pyramid* newsgroups, which uses the same NNTP protocol that Usenet does.

Usenet

Pyramid's newsgroups, using an NNTP client

Some advantages off the top of my head (many of which don't matter as much, but some of which still do):

- **Speed of reading/replying:** Since all messages were stored locally, the news reader could (and would, if you told it to) download all new messages in a group, or all messages in a thread, or all messages from a specific author, and so on. Nowadays this doesn't matter much, but in the dial-up days you could tell it to download all new messages from a group, get a snack, and by the time you're back, you have many uniterrupted minutes of information assimilation ahead of you. (And since NNTP messages don't have formatting or flashy avatars and graphics, the messages were tiny.)
- **Customizable reading experience:** Most good NNTP clients would give the user a fair bit of control over how messages would be displayed.
- **Easy archiving:** Again, since messages are stored locally, they're much easier to archive, save, and search.

So Usenet's been on its deathbed for a number of years; why do I mention it now?

Because I'm realizing how ineffective I find most modern methods of getting semi-common information.

I don't know about you all, but I do a *lot* of searching every day. Whether I'm doing research for a writing project, trying to troubleshoot a computer problem, or looking for trivia about a beloved television program or movie, I go to Google within the first minutes. And in the past couple of years, I've been noticing a real lack of answers of a certain catagory -- namely, the kind of questions that a community can answer (and, more often than not, does so, multiple times). So, let's say I'm trying to search for . . . oh, what the rarest *GURPS* books are. A standard Google search for "rarest GURPS" (no quotes) doesn't pop up anything useful. A search for "rarest GURPS" (with quotes) pops up two links, both of which are dead. Unfortunately, a search for "Rare GURPS" (with or without quotes) isn't much more helpful, since there's a website devoted to rare *GURPS* articles from . . . ummm . . . Usenet.

Now, as someone with an inside track, I have a reasonably good idea what the rare *GURPS* books are. (Hint: My *GURPS Prisoner* and *Bili the Axe: Up Harzburk!* get buried with me when I die.) But not everyone who would be looking for this information would be able to tap Steve Jackson on the shoulder (virtually) and ask him.

Now, the big thing that's replaced Usenet are private message boards, especially those for fan communities of games that are currently extant, and "big box"-type communities. SJGames has their own example of the former, and the gaming world's biggest example of the latter is RPGnet. I have absolutely no doubt that this move has been a godsend for the companies who run them; it's much easier to keep up with a community when you own the sandbox, not to mention the advantages of being able to kick out the kids who don't play nice. Of course, as someone who doesn't frequent a lot of boards, I also note that it's easy to develop a "tunnel vision" in this regard. For example, in the Usenet days, I used to read about other games because everyone was lumped into one generic "roleplaying" group; if someone was a fan of, say, *Feng Shui,* he might talk about it in a thread about another game. (As an aside, it's also one of the reasons I like lurking in the shadows of *Pyramid's* sjgames.roleplaying board; there are a lot of different voices lurking there, and I learn a fair bit about the game scene that I wouldn't find elsewhere.)

But if everyone is on West End Games' board to talk about West End Games' stuff, then it's harder to get exposed to new stuff. Sure, I could brave RPG.net for a similar experience, but it generally takes about 10 times as long as my old Usenet days. And some boards are hampered by being private or requiring registration; if I'm trying to find out information about a James Bond movie, why would I want to register with a message board just to be able to search it? (Assuming it's able to be searched, of course; RPG.net disabled their site's forum searchability many moons ago.)

Of course, I'm sure a lot of people's experience with Usenet was less than stellar; the system wasn't very user-friendly, the folks in the groups were often none too friendly (especially for newbies), and a fair bit of the enjoyability of the experience fell on the shoulders of the Usenet client one used. This latter one is especially problematic; unlike Outlook Express or other common e-mail clients, there was never a stellar universal standard Usenet client. (Rereading that, note that I don't necessarily believe Outlook Express is a stellar e-mail client. But I digress.) And that's too bad; while a modern forum site experience will be roughly the same from person to person, the customizability and power-user-ness of Usenet made the experience vary a lot among users. I guess the best analogy I can offer is e-mail. As best I can tell, most people who deal with more than a handful of e-mail use a local client (Outlook Express, Thunderbird, Eudora), which gives a lot of advantages. Now, what if the only way you could check your e-mail was via a web-based client, a la Hotmail? I don't know about most of you, but my e-mail would languish even longer than it does currently in that case.

Now, a few years ago this would have been just another old man's grumblings about how things were so much better. But, actually, there's been a development that's really gained traction in the past year or two that has really taken the edge off of this: the wiki. A well-designed and populated wiki -- the most famous of which is Wikipedia -- is like a constantly updating newsgroup. While in the newsgroup days I might search for the monthly FAQ update to see if a question is answered, in a Wiki I can keep probing various hyperlinked articles until I stand a fair shot at learning what I wanted. I think I realized the big change in my life when I noticed that, for about a third of my search queries (especially trivia- or history-type stuff), I started with Wikipedia instead of Google. Now, I don't think I'd ever trust my life on the information I'd find on a Wiki, it's still a great place to start, and most of the time -- like the Usenet days -- it's Good Enough.

(As an aside, I just did a Wikipedia search for Usenet -- basically, the first three-quarters of this article was done better by someone else in that piece . . . proving two points at once, I think.)

To tie this in loosely to gaming, I note that science fiction settings would do well to remember that new technology can replace the old in unexpected ways; Wikis aren't anything like Usenet, but for much of the function I used it for, it's the same. Fax machines became near-obsolete with the advent of e-mail, and to many in the next generation, instant messaging has utterly supplanted e-mail . . . despite the fact that all three techs are very different. What if, in the *Star Trek* universe, they never quite perfected replication, but they were able to get massive transdimensional site-to-site transport technology on non-living matter? Giant government warehouses of food would enable ships to continue doing many of the same functions as replicators, while introducing new opportunities and problems. ("Captain's Log: Since we have Intertran Beaming but no sub-space radio, I'm preparing another quarterly typed and printed report to

send back to Starfleet Command . . .")

Anyway, I know the clock can't be turned back, and I do have a reasonable enough time on some of the boards I frequent. But I notice that "frequent" feels a lot more infrequent than my Usenet days, and -- as I stumble across one more failed search result pointing to a stub of a dead BBS -- I find myself wondering what might have been.

--Steven Marsh

Department Of Transport

for *GURPS*

by Stephen Dedman

Sometimes even the best-prepared team of heroes will find themselves without a vehicle that will get them where they need to go -- be it the other side of a river too deep to ford, or a planet in a distant galaxy. The following characters are designed for those times when the GM needs a non-generic ship's captain, taxi driver, or barnstorming pilot to get the PCs out of (or into) trouble. All were created using *GURPS* Fourth Edition rules with a particular worldbook in mind, but require only minor changes to adapt to almost any setting.

Ragnar Lodestone, drakkar captain   *225 points*

Ht 5'10", Wt 180 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 34.

Appearance: Ruddy complexion, blue eyes, unruly sandy hair and short beard.

Languages: Old Norse (Native); Anglo-Saxon (Accented) [2*]; Old German (Accented) [2*]; Frankish (Broken) [1*]; Gaelic (Broken) [1*], Latin (Broken) [1*]. [7] TL: 3. Cultural Familiarity: Homeline. [7 points]

* Illiterate in languages other than Norse.

Attributes: **ST** 13 [30]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 12 [40]; *HT* 13 [30]. [120 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d/2d-1; BL 34; HP 13 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 13 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages and Perks: Absolute Direction [5], Ally Group (Ship's Crew, Constantly Present, group of 6-10, 50% point total) [48], Charisma/1 [5], Combat Reflexes [15], Status +2 [10], Temperature Tolerance/1 [1], Wealth (Comfortable) [10] [94 points]

Disadvantages and Quirks: Always carries at least two knives [-1], Attentive [-1], Bloodlust [-10], Code of Honor (Viking) [-10], Collects art objects from distant lands [-1], Congenial [-1], Duty (to Crew, 12 or less) [-10], Duty (to Jarl, 12 or less) [-10], Incompetence (Musical Instrument) [-1], Overconfidence (6)[-10]. [-55 points]

Skills: Area Knowledge (Shipping Routes) (E) IQ [4]-13; Boating (Sailboat/TL3) (A) DX [2]-11; Brawling (E) DX [1]-11; Carpentry (E) IQ [1]-12; Connoisseur (Visual Arts) (A) IQ [1]-11; Crewman (Seamanship/TL3) (E) IQ [2]-13; Fast-Talk (A) IQ [2]-12; Fishing (E) Per [1]-12; Leadership (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Melee Weapon (Axe/Mace) (A) DX [1]-10, (Broadsword) (A) DX+2 [8]-13, (Knife) (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Merchant (A) IQ [2]-12; Meteorology/TL3 (E) IQ [1]-11; Navigation/TL3 (Sea) (A) IQ+1 [4]-16*; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-12; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-12; Shield (E) DX_1 [2]-12; Shiphandling/TL3 (Ship) (H) IQ+1 [8]-13; Skating (H) DX-2 [1]-9; Survival (Sea) (A) IQ [2]-12; Swimming (E) DX [1]-11; Tactics (H) IQ [4]-12; Thrown Weapon (Knife) (E) DX+1 [2]-12, (Axe) (E) DX [1]-11. [60 points]

* +3 for Absolute Direction

Gear: Fine Broadsword; Light Shield; 1 large knife, 1 small knife, 1 dagger; Pot Helm; Fur Tunic (DR 1), sleeveless, with gold filigree belt buckle; leather breeches (DR 1); boots; silver arm-rings.

Ragnar Olafsson was born in Denmark in 805 A.D., the son of a fisherman and former sea-rover. Even as a boy,

Ragnar became almost legendary for his sense of direction, earning the nickname Ragnar Lodestone. He was later trained as a navigator, serving on merchant knarrs (cargo ships) and later becoming captain of a 20-oar drakkar (dragon ship). After his wife died giving birth to his stillborn first son, Ragnar spent less and less time in Denmark and more at sea.

Ragnar always shared his loot fairly with his crew, but he always made sure he had first pick of any jewelry or art objects. His time as a merchant had given him a good eye for beautifully made items, and his sea-chest contains several artistic treasures -- including many that would be of great interest to modern historians.

Ragnar and his crew died in the English channel in 839 when the drakkar was swamped by a sudden fierce storm . . . but some 150 years later, the magician Gerbert discovered that the ghost ship, with its captain and crew, could easily be summoned and compelled to carry passengers and/or small amounts of cargo to anywhere Ragnar had ever sailed. This covers the east coast of Britain, the north-west of Ireland, the Faeroes, and the European shoreline from Brest to the Urals, as well as the major rivers in that area. Over the years since, many other magicians have learned how to call forth Ragnar and his crew, using their ship either as a means of escape from the Inquisition or other foes, or to carry fighters into a sneak attack on a coastal community. All it takes is for a magician to stand in water at least 3' deep, in a place that the drakkar can sail into, and cast a Summon Spirit spell (at the appropriate penalties; see p. 252 of the *Basic Set*). If it's successful, the ghost ship will manifest before him in solid form; if the magician can then speak to Ragnar in a language both know at either native or accented level, and Ragnar has a Neutral or better reaction to him, then he (and his party, if any) will be welcomed onto the boat, which will then revert to spirit form. If he has a Very Bad or worse reaction, of course, the Vikings will attack.

Campaign Uses

In a Viking campaign, or fantasy campaign which has a culture similar to that of the Vikings, the PCs may be crew or warriors on (the living) Ragnar's ship. Alternatively, they may be his enemies or rivals. Otherwise, Ragnar's drakkar is intended mainly as a means of getting around Europe stealthily at any time after about 990 AD: in its usual spirit form, the longship is undetectable by non-magical means until it actually beaches.

Ragnar and his Vikings are unaware that they are ghosts, and it is impolite for PCs to suggest otherwise. They exist from day to day with no sense of longer stretches of time passing; the food and drink in their sea-chests is restored every sunrise, and will never run out. PCs who eat this food, or drink their beer, will be unable to leave the ship unless a magician finds a way to remove the curse. The same is true of anyone whose blood is shed on board, or who tries to steal anything from the ship, be it one of Ragnar's genuine treasures (which include a prayer-book illuminated with gold leaf, a silver filigree reliquary, and a small jade figurine of Buddha) or an oarsman's cheap dagger. The ship is therefore dangerous for anyone with any of the following disadvantages: Kleptomania, Gluttony, Alcoholism, Greed, or Obsession (collecting archeological artifacts or art treasures).

Other Settings

Though designed for a Viking campaign (while alive) or Middle Ages campaign with fantasy elements (in spirit form), Ragnar's drakkar may be used in any Horror campaign, or any other campaign where magic works, or adapted for any fantasy setting.

Ragnar's Drakkar

TL 3; **ST/HP** 109; Hnd/SR -3/3; **HT** 12c; Move 1/6; LWt 60; Load 54; SM +7; Occ 81+40; DR 3; Range -; Cost $20k; Loc MO; Draft 2.5.

Ragnar's drakkar has a crew of 80 oarsmen as well as the captain/navigator. Ten of these crewmen are old friends of Ragnar's who are absolutely loyal (and each has at least one ally of his own), but these statistics may be used for any crewman on the boat.

Ragnar's allies   100 points

Attributes: **ST** 13 [30]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 12 [20]. [70 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d/2d-1; BL 34; HP 13 [0]; Will 12 [4]; Per 11 [5]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]. [9 points]

Advantages and Perks: Alcohol Tolerance [1], Ally (fellow crewmember, Constantly Present, 100% point total) [20], Combat Reflexes [15], Fearlessness/3 [6], Fit [5], Status/1 [5], Temperature Tolerance +2 [2]. [50 points]

Disadvantages and Quirks: Bloodlust [-10], Code of Honor (Viking) [-10], Congenial [-1], Duty (to crew, 12 or less) [-10], Duty (to kin, 12 or less) [-10], Overconfidence (12)[-5]. [-46]

Skills: Area Knowledge (Shipping Routes) (E) IQ [1]-10; Boating (Sailboat/TL3) (A) DX [2]-11; Brawling (E) DX [1]-11; Carpentry (E) IQ [1]-10; Crewman (Seamanship/TL3) (E) IQ+2 [4]-12; Fishing (E) Per [1]-11; Melee Weapon (Axe/Mace) (A) DX [4]-12, (Knife) (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Meteorology/TL3 (E) IQ [1]-11; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-10; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-11; Shield (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Skating (H) DX-2 [1]-9; Survival (Sea) (A) IQ [2]-10; Swimming (E) DX [1]-11; Thrown Weapon (Knife) (E) DX [1]-10, (Axe) (E) DX+1 [2]-11. [30]

Gear: Axe; Francesca (throwing axe); Light Shield; large knife; Pot Helm; Fur Tunic (DR 1); breeches; boots.

Christy Lynch, stagecoach driver (Old West/Deadlands)   140 points

Ht 5'7", Wt 105 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 42.

Appearance: Tanned complexion, brown eyes, red-brown hair cropped short.

Languages: English (Native), Spanish (Broken) [2]. TL: 5. Cultural Familiarity: Homeline.

Attributes: **ST** 10 [0]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 11 [20]. [80 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 26; HP 11 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 12 [5]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]. [5 points]

Advantages and Perks: Alcohol Tolerance [1], High Pain Threshold [10], Honest Face [1], Talent (Animal Friend)/2 [10]. [22 points].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Broad-Minded [-1], Dislikes crowds and avoids cities [-1], Likes dark-haired women with exotic accents [-1], Responsive [-1], Secret [woman disguised as man, -10], Skinny [-5], Wounded [-5]. [-24 points].

Skills: Acting (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Animal Handling (Equines) (A) IQ+3 [4]-14*, (Cattle) (A) IQ+2 [1]-12*†; Area Knowledge (Western USA) (E) IQ+2 [4]-13; Boating (Unpowered/TL5) (A) DX [1]-11; Brawling (E) DX [1]-12; Carousing (E) HT [1]-10; Detect Lies (H) IQ-2 [1]-9; Disguise (A) IQ [4]-10 ‡; Fast-Draw (Pistol) (E) DX [2]-13, Fast-Draw (Knife) (E) DX [1]-13; Fast-Talk (A) IQ [4]-12; First Aid/TL5 (E) IQ [2]-12; Guns/TL6 (Pistol) (E) DX+2 [4]-14, (Rifle) DX+1 [1]-13†; Holdout (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Lasso (A) DX+1 [4]-13; Melee Weapon (Knife) (E) DX [1]-12, (Whip) (A) DX+1 [4]-13; Packing (A) IQ+2 [2]-13*,; Riding (Horse) (A) DX+2 [2]-14*; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-11; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-12; Soldier (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Streetwise (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Survival (Desert) (A) Per-1 [1]-11; Teamster (Equine) (A) IQ+2 [1]-12*†. [58 points]

* +2 for Talent (Animal Friend)
† Improved from Default

‡ -2 for Skinny

Gear: Colt Lightning double-action revolver (treat as Revolver, .38, p.B278); Lever-Action Carbine; .41 Derringer; large knife; 5-yard Bullwhip. Wears heavy leather leggings [p. B283], old Levis, faded red shirt, yellow bandana, sombrero and army boots.

Christy Lynch has lived an eventful life and seen much of the U.S. west of Chicago -- as a Pony Express rider, riverboat gambler, soldier, trail boss, buffalo hunter, and a variety of other jobs before becoming a stagecoach driver. Not all of the stories Christy tells are true, of course, and most of them leave out one important detail: Christy is actually a woman, something she's determined to keep a secret from all but a few close friends -- most of them "soiled doves" in different towns, who prefer her company to that of cowboys and miners.

The coming of the railroads has meant that the stagecoaches only run between those towns too small or unimportant or remote to be reached by train, and it's in these rarely visited areas that the PCs are most likely to meet Christy. Her coach will rarely be more than half full (1d+1 random travelers), with room on board for a typical posse, even if some have to ride on the roof. If she's carrying anything that might attract robbers, she will also be accompanied by a heavily armed expressman riding shotgun -- or need to hire one.

Campaign Uses

In a *Deadlands* campaign, the lonely trails that Christy rides are also likely to be haunted by abominations such as dust devils, tumblebleeds, wall crawlers and other varmints -- and Christy will know just where such creatures might be found, and can lead the PCs to them. In a more conventional Old West setting, she can serve as a source of information as well as a means of transport -- or come riding to the PCs' rescue in places (the "roads" she follows can only be detected with roll on Tracking at +3; the PCs might be on one and not know it). In an Outlaw campaign, the PCs might try to rob Christy's coach, and find that the scrawny old teamster is more than he seems.

Other Settings

Someone like Christy might be encountered in a post-holocaust setting or on a low-tech planet, where fuel is harder to come by than oats or hay. Change a few skills, and she might be found driving a Greyhound or a truck in an *Autoduel* campaign, or in a bandit-infested region in a *Cliffhangers* or modern-day adventure.

Christy's Coach: a Concord coach, seats six comfortably, with room for three more inside and another six on the roof. See "Coach," p. 464 of the *Basic Set.*

Typical Expressman   *100 points*

Attributes: **ST** 12 [20]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 10 [0]. [60 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29; HP 12 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 12 [10]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]. [10 points]

Advantages and Perks: Combat Reflexes [15], Fearlessness/2 [4]. [19 points]

Disadvantages and Quirks: Bloodlust [-10], Careful [-1], Uncongenial [-1]. -12 points]

Skills: Area Knowledge (Western USA) (E) IQ [1]-10; Brawling (E) DX [1]-12; Fast-Draw (Pistol) (E) DX+1 [2]-14*, Fast-Draw (Knife) (E) DX+1 [1]-13*, Fast-Draw (Shotgun) (E) DX+2 [2]-14; Guns/TL6 (Pistol) (E) DX+1 [4]-14, (Shotgun) DX+2 [3]-14 †; Holdout (A) IQ [2]-10; Melee Weapon (Knife) (E) DX [1]-12; Riding (Horse) (A) DX [4]-13; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-10; Streetwise (A) IQ [2]-10. [23 points].

* +1 from Combat Reflexes.

† Improved from Default.

Gear: Two Colt Lightning double-action revolvers (treat as Revolver, .38, p.B278); 10G double shotgun; large knife; cartridge belt with six rounds 10G and 20 rounds .38.

Eric "Eaglebeak" Ekberg, barnstormer (Cliffhangers)   135 points

Ht 6'2", Wt 155 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 37.

Appearance: Homely and ungainly-looking. Freckled complexion, green eyes, unruly dark brown hair, prominent nose, bad posture, walks with a limp.

Languages: English (Native); French (Accented) [4]; Russian (Broken) [2]; Mandarin Chinese (Broken) [2]. TL: 6. Cultural Familiarities: Homeline. [8 points]

Attributes: **ST** 10 [0]; **DX** 13 [60]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 11 [0]. [100 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 14 [10]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 6 [0]; Basic Move 3 [-15]. [-5 points]

Advantages: 3D Spatial Sense [10]; Acute Vision/2 [4]; Charisma/2 [10]; Daredevil [15]; Fearlessness/2 [4]; Less Sleep/1 [2]. [30 points]

Disadvantages and Quirks: Agnostic, but keeps kosher when possible [-1]; Appearance (Unattractive) [-5]; Broad-Minded [1]; Charitable (12) [-15]; Debt/5 [-5]; Easy to Read [-10]; Incompetence (Accounting) [-1]; Lame (Crippled leg) [-10]; Overconfidence (9) [-7]; Pacifism (Self-Defense Only) [-15]. [-70 points].

Skills: Astronomy/TL6 (H) IQ-2 [1]-10; Cartography (A) IQ-1 [2]-12; Current Affairs/TL6 (Headline News) (E) IQ [1]-11; Driving/TL6 (Automobile) (A) DX [2]-13; First Aid/TL6 (E) IQ [2]-13; Geography/TL6 (Physical) (H) IQ-1 [2]-11; Guns/TL6 (Pistol) (E) DX [1]-13; Mechanic (Airplane engines) (A) IQ [4]-13; Merchant (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Meteorology/TL6 (E) IQ [1]-12; Navigation/TL3 (Air) (A) IQ+4 [2]-16*; Piloting/TL6 (Heavy Airplane)(A) DX+3 [12]-16*; Research/TL6 (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-12; Scrounging (E) Per +1 [2]-15; Smuggling (A) IQ [2]-12; Soldier (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Survival (Woodlands) (A) IQ-1 [1]-11. [39 points]

* includes bonus for 3D Spatial Sense.

Gear: Leather Jacket; Leather Pants; Leather flying helmet; leather gloves; shoes; pocket knife; cigarette lighter. Gear in plane includes Auto Pistol, 9mm, with lanyard and 100 rounds ammo; Flak Jacket; Crash Kit; mechanic portable tool kit; heavy flashlights; telescope; flares; and sleeping bag.

Eric Ekberg was an impressionable seven year old when he first heard that the Wright brothers had flown, and from that day, he became obsessed with becoming a pilot. Even being shot down over France during the Great War didn't extinguish his love of flying, though it diminished his enthusiasm for dogfights. While recuperating from a shattered leg, he thought back on the two enemy pilots he'd shot down and decided that if he were to fly again, he wanted to save lives rather than take them.

In 1920, Eric bought a cheap war-surplus biplane and became a barnstormer, making some money on the side during Prohibition flying good booze from Canada into the U.S. His dream of saving lives with his plane came true in 1929, when he was able to find the missing son of a millionaire lost at sea, and drop him an inflatable boat and some emergency supplies. The grateful magnate bought Eric a larger plane -- a Stinson Detroiter -- and Eric set up his own charter business. He's a much better pilot and mechanic than he is a businessman, however, and often turns down safe and steady work in favor of mercy missions or risky propositions that will enable him to fly to new places.

Campaign Uses

Eric makes a useful Ally or hireling, as he can take the PCs to all but the most inaccessible spots on the globe (his plane can be fitted with skis or floats as well as wheels). He can also come to their rescue when they need it -- and discuss the bill later.

Other Settings

Eric is designed for a Cliffhangers campaign, but could still be flying in any later era -- even in a small starship or a parachronic conveyor.

Stinson Detroiter: TL6; **ST/HP** 45; Hnd/SR 0/3; **HT** 10f; Move 2/55; LWt 2.25; Load .66; SM +5; Occ 1+5P; DR 4; Range 750; $12.5K; Loc G2WWi; Stall 30.

Virgil "Gus" Pastore, Taxi driver (modern day)   45 points

Ht 5'8", Wt 190 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 43.

Appearance: Average complexion, dark brown eyes, receding dark brown hair, stocky and somewhat pear-shaped.

Languages: English (Native); Italian (Native) [6]. TL: 8. Cultural Familiarities: Homeline. [6 points]

Attributes: **ST** 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; **IQ** 10 [0]; HT 9 [-10]. [-10 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20; HP 10 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 11 [5]; FP 9 [0]; Basic Speed 4.75 [0]; Basic Move 4 [0]. [5 points]

Advantages: Contacts (Military, usually reliable, skill 15, 6-) [2], (Police, usually reliable, skill 12, 9-) [2], (Street, somewhat reliable, skill 15, 9-), [2]; Eidetic Memory [5]; Night Vision/5 [5]; Sensitive [5]. [31 points]

Disadvantages and Quirks: Addiction (Amphetamines, see p.B440) [-5]; Appearance (Unattractive) [-5]; Combat Paralysis [-15]; Curious (15) [-2]; Dreamer [-1]; Lecherous when drunk [-1]; Overweight [-1]; Sports fan, especially football and boxing [-1]; Unfit [-5]. [-36 points].

Skills: Area Knowledge/TL6 (City) (E) IQ+4 [12]-14; Boxing (A) DX [2]-10; Current Affairs/TL8 (Regional) (E) IQ+3 [8]-13; Driving/TL6 (Automobile) (A) DX+2 [8]-12; First Aid/TL6 (E) IQ [1]-10; Gambling (A) IQ [4]-11; Guns/TL8 (Pistol) (E) DX [1]-10; Mechanic (Gas engines) (A) IQ+1 [4]-11; Merchant (A) IQ [2]-10; Navigation/TL8 (Land) (A) IQ [2]-10; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-10; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-11; Shadowing (A) IQ [2]-10; Streetwise (A) IQ+2 [8]-12; Writing (A) IQ-1 [1]-9. [56 points]

Gear: Snub revolver, .38; cell phone with camera; Ballistic Vest; leather jacket; leather cap; shoes.

The youngest of five brothers, Virgil Pastore spent most of his childhood wearing hand-me-down clothes, playing with hand-me-down toys, and riding hand-me-down bicycles. Even his jobs as a taxi driver and pizza delivery boy had previously belonged to his elder brothers while they waited to start their new careers -- in the Air Force, police, and fire departments respectively (the eldest, the only one the family could afford to send to college, became a priest). After failing to make it through basic training or win a scholarship and being rejected by the police force, NASA and the C.I.A., Virgil decided to become a writer, driving the taxi while he waited for his big break. Twenty years later, he's still unpublished and still driving the taxi. He does, however, know his city and its people extremely well -- from the scum to the dregs and everything in between, as he likes to say. Some of his knowledge comes from his brothers, but most of it is first-hand. To him, it's research for the thrillers he writes when he's off-duty. For the heroes, it may be exactly what they need to know.

Gus has convinced himself that most of the city's criminal enterprises are merely meeting demand, and that most crooks only kill each other. If he has a good or better reaction to the PCs (a large tip helps -- and if there's any chance of glory, that's even better), he'll give them any help he can, but he won't knowingly be an accomplice to a crime against innocent people. He's no vigilante, however, and is much more likely to reach for a cell phone and call the cops than he is to draw his gun.

Campaign Uses

Gus is most useful as a guide to an unfamiliar and dangerous city. He knows the best places to shop for almost anything, legal or illegal, including weapons and hirelings. He knows which cops and judges can be bought, and the going price, and which are incorruptible. He knows where the politicians and organized crime figures can usually be found, and the places where the police only go in force. He knows short-cuts that will get the PCs somewhere ahead of the villains -- and he's almost always delighted to be asked to follow another car.

Other Settings

Variants of Gus may be found pulling rickshaws, pedaling trishaws, poling gondolas, or driving cabs (albeit hansom cabs) in a wide range of historic as well as modern or near-future game-worlds. In a *Supers* campaign, his admiration for sporting heroes will be replaced by a fascination with super-heroes. In an *Autoduel* world, he would be mostly unchanged, though his car is likely to be much more interesting.

Professor Melissa de Jong, Starship captain (Space)   *200 points*

Ht 5'6", Wt 115 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 96.

Humanoid female, attractive, pitch-black skin, dark green eyes, bald.

Languages: English (Native). TL: 10. Cultural Familiarity: Homeline (Sector).

Attributes: **ST** 9 [-10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 11 [10]. [80 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16; HP 9 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Acute Vision/2 [4]; Deep Sleeper [1]; Doesn't Breathe (Limitation: Oxygen Storage, can hold breath for 50 times as long as usual) [12]; Eidetic Memory [5]; G-Experience (all) [10]; High Manual Dexterity/3 [15]; Protected Senses (Vision) [5]; Sensitive Touch [10]; Serendipity/1 [15]; Temperature Tolerance/3 [3]; Tenure [5]; Vacuum Support [5]. [90 points]

Disadvantages and Quirks: Absent-minded about eating [-1]; Attentive [-1]; Curious (9) [-7]; Imaginative [-1]; Impulsiveness (15) [-5]; Pacifism (Self-Defense Only) [-15]; Stubborn [-5]; Uncongenial [-1]; Xenophilia (12) [-10]. [-36 points].

Skills: Administration (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Archaeology (H) IQ+1 [8]-14; Area Knowledge (Galaxy) (E) IQ [2]-14; Astronomy/TL10 (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Beam Weapons/TL10 (Pistol) (E) DX [1]-11; Breath Control (H) HT-1 [2]-10; Climbing (A) DX [1]-10; Computer Operation/TL10 (E) IQ [1]-13; Current Affairs/TL10 (Science & Technology) (E) IQ [1]-13; Engineer/TL10 (Starship) (H) IQ-2 [1]-11; Environment Suit/TL10 (A) DX [2]-11; Expert Skill (Xenology) (H) IQ+1 [8]-14; Free Fall (A) DX [4]-12; Freight Handling (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Geography/TL10 (Earthlike planets/Physical) (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Navigation/TL10 (Space) (A) IQ [2]-13; Photography/TL10 (A) IQ [2]-13; Physician/TL10 (H) IQ [2]-13; Piloting/TL10 (High-Performance Spacecraft) (A) DX+2 [8]-13; Research/TL10 (A) IQ+1 [4]-14; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-13; Scrounging (E) Per+1 [2]-14; Search (A) Per+1 [4]-14; Survival (Earthlike

Desert) (A) Per+1 [2]-13; Writing (A) IQ [2]-13. [66 points]

Gear: Laser Pistol (see p.B280); TL10 Vacc Suit (see p.B285).

Melissa de Jong retired from teaching xeno-archaeology at Oxford more than twenty years ago, but remained at the university as a tenured research fellow longer than anyone expected. Eventually the college bursar decided that it would be cheaper to buy her a used Survey Service scout-ship than to keep paying her travel expenses. Melissa was delighted, and had her brain transplanted into an android body capable of surviving brief periods in vacuum and other hostile environments before stocking the starship with ration packs and bottles of good wine, downloading her library into the computer, and taking off. She re-appeared a year later, transmitted a report to the university and re-stocked the ship, then set off again in search of new sites.

Melissa isn't a particularly good pilot, navigator or engineer, and tends to leave these details up to the ship's long-suffering AI (which also has to remind her when to eat) or to the rare graduate student brave enough to fly with her. Because her greatest discoveries have come out of following her hunches, she never files a flight plan and could turn up anywhere at any time -- possibly exactly when the PCs need transportation off-world. She will rescue people in need, but will not accept money from them -- though she may allow them to work their passage. The problem with relying on Melissa for a lift is that she will not be swayed from her own apparently random course, and the PCs may have to make several lengthy unexpected stops before reaching another starport.

Campaign Uses

Melissa de Jong is intended primarily as a means of rescuing stranded space travelers and taking them to other planets of the GM's choosing, though it is also conceivable that the PCs will be hired to locate and possibly rescue her.

Other Settings

Someone like Professor de Jong would be even more dangerous in charge of a parachronic conveyor or time machine than a starship. In lower-tech settings, she could be converted into a marine archaeologist with her own research vessel, or a paleontologist roaming the wild west in a prairie schooner.

Adventure Seeds

One-Horse Town *(Deadlands/Old West):* The PCs spend the night in a small town, and wake up to find their horses have been stolen. The only other transport available is Christy Lee's coach -- and Christy is more than willing to help them, as she detests horse thieves, is heading towards the town where the thief is likely to try to sell the horses, and needs a replacement for her Expressman (who has contracted food poisoning and is too sick to finish the journey). She'll pay the best shot in the posse $2/day to ride shotgun with her, which should more than cover the 15 cents per mile she charges the rest of the heroes and any other passengers.

Unfortunately, Christy and the PCs are riding into an ambush. In a Deadlands campaign, her strongbox contains a relic, an unholy symbol which attracts abominations. In an Old West campaign, it contains a 600-lb solid lump of silver and a diamondback rattlesnake.

Emergency Exit *(Cliffhangers):* The heroes have just succeeded in raiding the stronghold of Aryan Shah, a Tajik mercenary who has installed himself as a warlord in northern Afghanistan, while Shah's lieutenant was away leading a raiding party. Erik Ekberg arrives to pick them up -- but there's a small complication. Shah's collection of art treasures and antique weapons is heavy and bulky, and the PCs have also liberated his harem of five women kidnapped from different countries. Ekberg will give first priority to the wounded, then to the rescued women, then to healthy adventurers, and finally to the loot. His Detroiter seats six, but by removing all the seats but his own, he can squeeze 1320lbs worth of people and/or cargo in at a time. The return trip to Kabul, the nearest airfield and relative safety, takes six or seven hours; the raiding party may return at any time.

The women's weights range from 80 to 200 lbs (3d+2 × 10 lbs), their ages from 13 to 38 (5d+8); none speaks English (their native languages are Korean, Swedish, Kiswahili, Hindi, and Portuguese), but all have learned Broken Farsi (Persian). If communication breaks down (or on a bad or worse reaction roll), the women may not trust or co-operate with the rescue -- and the PCs may understandably feel nervous about leaving them alone with the more portable items of loot.

Connoisseur (Visual Arts), Archaeology, or Merchant skills will help the PCs pick the most valuable items out of Shah's collection.

Those in Peril on the Sea *(Weird WWII):* 1943: the PCs, escaped POWs or downed aircrew, have reached Denmark in the hope of making their way to Sweden and then back to England. They are offered shelter by an old gypsy who says she can provide them with a boat, as long as they help escort her family and a group of Jews past the SS patrols to the coast.

The gypsy's boat, when it arrives, is Ragnar's drakkar. Some of the refugees fail their fright checks, and have to be manhandled on board. And a few miles from the Swedish shore, the drakkar encounters another ghost ship -- a medieval cog (p. 464 of the *Basic Set*). The ship has no weapons, but ten of its crew are soldiers armed with crossbows (skill-13); one fires at what he thinks is a ghost ship. The shot misses, but at least one PC should realize that the crossbows have a much better range than the vikings' weapons, and that an attack on the cog is likely to cause unnecessary casualties. It's up to the PCs to persuade Ragnar to stay out of range and keep heading for shore, rather than attacking the cog.

Reflected Glory *(Supers):* The metavillain Luxor, with his power to cast laser beams or blinding flashes from his glowing eyes, has escaped from a SWAT team after being badly wounded. The next day, the PCs receive a call to say that a local cabbie claims that Luxor, in plain clothes, fled the scene by catching his cab. The cabbie, Pastore, can confirm that he made a pick-up in the appropriate general area shortly after Luxor's escape, and offers as proof the bloodstains in the back of his cab -- which glow pink in the dark. Pastore doesn't want money for revealing the location of Luxor's possible hideout: he wants to take the supers there himself, so that he's part of the story if Luxor is captured. Pastore has the right location -- but the hideout, underneath a scientific supply warehouse, is defended by Luxor's laser and bio-chemical weapons, and Luxor's super-powered allies will come to his aid if need be.

Ars Longa, Vita Brevis *(Space):* The PCs are stranded parsecs from any inhabited world when their stardrive fails catastrophically, and Melissa de Jong's scout-ship is the first to answer their distress call. Unfortunately for the heroes, de Jong insists on going to the uninhabited world of Shakak before the summer thaw ends and the ruins there are once again buried beneath the icecaps.

Shortly after de Jong and the adventurers land, another ship comes down nearby -- thieves, intent on looting the site of valuables. They're only lightly armed, but they outnumber the PCs two to one. The good news is that their ship is the same model as the heroes, and if they steal the parts they need to repair their own ship, the thieves will be stranded on Shakak's icecap until the police arrive.

Additional Links

- **Concord Coach** -- http://www.wellsfargo.com/about/history/stagecoach/concord
- **Stinson Detroiter** -- http://members.shaw.ca/flightlines/smg_sm1dd.htm

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Avoid Endless Romps in Hallways

Having finally completed my latest big writing project a couple of day ago (or, at least, the contractually required first draft of it), I find myself breathing a sigh of relief at having successfully pushed another freelance demon down the stairs, causing him to twist his ankle slightly before springing up -- fully healed -- in a dramatic fashion to continue the pursuit anew. And, while I live in fear that the sumitted document contains 64-word sentences such as the one proceeding this one, I figure any catastrophic oversights are what second drafts are for. So, as a result, I've taken a couple of days off, assessing what went right and what went wrong with my latest writing venture.

Now, I won't bore you with those details, but I will note that a fair bit of consternation was caused by the fact that I've spent, roughly, 75% of my time in the past two weeks in my office. Now, I think I've described it in the past, but my is actually a converted walk-in closet. This has some definite advantages; for one thing, heating's a cheap snap, even in the chilly winter . . . closing the door is usually enough to maintain the temperature level, thanks to the constant hum of the computer, monitor, and printer, and turning on a space heater for a few minutes is enough to get the entire room toasty. Another advantage is that this organizational legerdemain resulted in another "room" for meager our two-bedroom apartment (since I exhibited the wisdom that God gave earthworms by insisting the new Mrs. got the second bedroom for her secret Fortress of Solitude).

But there are also some really big disadvantages, such as needing to remember to leave the room every so often so the air can replenish. And even more significant than the fear of suffocative death is the fact that it's pretty boring spending multiple hours at a stretch in a 10"×5" windowless room. Attempting to alleviate the boredom I dug up my old *Mystery Science Theater 3000* tapes from Cardboard Box #4815162342, and I blared in the next room's VCR.

Please note that, in accordance with the Columnist Information Act of 2003, I am required to assure you at this time that this article *will* tie into gaming. One of the episodes I had on a near-continuous loop was one called ["Soultaker."](#) Like so many MST3K episodes, the underlying movie was pretty bad. Without giving away too much about said movie, approximately 1,624% of the movie takes place in a hospital, with people running around the hospital, having exposatory scenes in the hospital, getting into chases in the hospital, and -- in a climactic moment of the film -- jumping off the roof of the hospital, landing outside of the hopsital, and then running back *inside* the hospital. This is a pacing coup de grace of plentiful pain.

Anyway, my mind escaping inside my skull as it's often wont to do, at some point around word 26,000 I realized that the movie *Soultaker* and I had something in common -- we couldn't escape our respective "prisons" (be they hospitals or closets). And it's a problem I've noticed with some RPG adventures, including some I've run: Namely, the reticence to change the scene. Many badly paced movies have a problem with pacing a scene, including knowing when to make a change of scenery. So do many gaming adventures; some tales have the PCs running around the same sets of rooms over and over, or hanging out at the same spot too long.

My late, great former writing professor [Jerome Stern](#) told us about an interesting way to watch a movie (at least from an audience/writer's standpoint). For each scene, determine at what point the purpose of the scene has been established, then start doing a mental second-count to see how much longer the scene lasts beyond that. For example, if the purpose of the scene is to establish, "These two characters are falling in love" or "this mastermind is evil"; while it's often impossible going into a new movie to determine what a scene is doing, it's surprising how often it's *not*. (As an aside, this was one of my big criticisms about the movie *Good Will Hunting,* a film universally beloved by my friends and peers, depsite having scenes that generally lasted about a minute or so too long. "Yes; you're brilliant and rage-filled and no one understands you. Got it.")

Now, it's entirely possible to be at a set location for an extended period of time (and, indeed, I've [given](#) such [advice](#) in the [past](#)), it's important to make sure that your locations have variations, sublocations, and interesting permeutations. And, in the gaming world, it's also important to know when to do a screen-wipe and go on to the next scene.

For the rest of this week's column, I'll be looking at the first half of that equation: variations, sublocations, and permeutations.

Soultaker's crime was not setting the entire movie in a hospital; entire television series have taken place within hospitals. (I'm sure movies have, but I can't think of any right now.) No; what *Soultaker* got wrong was in having so much of the movie take place in chase scenes in the hallways of a hospital. Sadly, I can't think of any easy way to fix such a deficiency, since no matter how much you spruce up a hallway you still end up with a spruced-up hallway. But hospitals, in and of themselves, aren't boring. And even the most seemingly boring places can have interesting twists and possibilities spun on them.

Let's see if we can't approach the gamability of one of the most boring examples I can think of: The courtroom drama. While these can play out pretty well on television (I'm a big fan of the 87 *Law & Order* franchises), the basic idea of "judge, jury, prosecutor, defense, witnesses" etc. sounds like a pretty boring gaming session. Now, I've even run a courtroom drama as an RPG adventure -- once. And it was pretty fun and well-received . . . once. But the idea of doing that week after week -- or even for a three-part adventure series -- doesn't fill me with warm fuzzies.

But then I just start brainstorming all the places I could use in a courtroom drama series. Staying within the courthouse itself:

- Courtroom
- Judges' chambers
- Hallway
- Jury room
- Courtroom corridor (probably the best spot for those dramatic hallway screaming matches)
- Security entrance area
- Clerks' offices
- Restrooms (lots of deals can get brokered with words and a handshake . . . minus the handshake)

Now, I note that that's seven spots right there . . . and some of them have multiple possibilities. (For example, each judge has his own chamber, so each of those chambers could be made as distinctive and unusual as the judges themselves should be.) And this doesn't even count the possibilities that come in if you can go outside the courthouse, since that's part of next week's column.

What does this list mean? Well, for many players (including myself and most of the ones I've been with) having possible changes of scenery means that you get a chance to refocus, to think of the adventures as having scenes, rather than being a long, boring sequence of events like real life. For example, let's say the judge needs to make a decision from the bench. Well, while it's probably possible for him to make his decision and go on with the game, it's often equally possible for the judge to retire to his chambers. And if the GM looks at his watch and realizes that it's been an hour since the last scene change, why not have that judge go to chambers? Heck, there are two easy possibilities right there: the judge summons the laywers (at least one of whom is bound to be a PC) for a private discussion, or a recess is declared and all the lawyers and other characters (again, probably including a handful of PCs) will have to stand around and possibly interact elsewhere.

And, depending on how "cinematic" you want to be (for sufficiently Ally McBeal-y values of "cinematic"), it's also possible to introduce various permutations within the locations themselves. We've already talked about having different judges' chambers; now, what if each courtroom had something interesting going on in there? For example, maybe the acoustics are oddly off in one courtroom, so that lawyers need to speak unusually quietly or loudly to be understood. Or maybe only one courtroom is set up for video recording, so all the "high-profile" ones need to go there. Maybe one courtroom has been recently renovated, and it has all the "new" material, is the most compelling/comfortable. And so on.

Even the most seemingly standardized locations all have personality and quirks; insinuate to any diehard baseball fan that all stadiums are the same, and you'd better prepare for an earful. As such, even an office with a hundred different cubicles has the possibility to be not one boring location, but a 100+ interesting ones. Think about the possibilities, and go outside the box. After all, it's like they say: Scenery is belivery.

--Steven Marsh

The Best of Both Worlds

Bringing Psionic Power Levels and Skills into *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Reverend P. Kitty

With the change from "Power Groups" to the new "Talent, Abilities and Power Modifier" approach, psi has become incredibly versatile. Players and GMs can create anything they might envision, secure in the knowledge that it can be made into an ESP ability with the simple addition of a power modifier. However, a blank canvas can be rather intimidating, especially to an inexperienced player (or GM). And even many of the seasoned *GURPS* gamers still look to the old Third Edition Power Groups, longing for a return to the psionic dichotomy of Power and Skill.

It makes sense. The concept -- that your Power determines what you can do and your Skill determines how well you can do it -- is both logical and easy to understand. It can also be simpler for new players and GMs in a hurry. While there are many players who love sitting down and figuring out which advantages are needed and adding in all of the enhancements and limitations to create the perfect psionic ability, there are at least as many who would rather just look at a shopping list of what's available, write "Telesend, Power 4, Skill 13" on their character sheet and be done with it. Fortunately, this is still possible to do in Fourth Edition.

All it takes is a little bit of advance planning.

Forged from Raw Power . . .

While Power Groups are gone for good, it's still simple to turn each specific psionic ability into a leveled advantage. The first step is to determine how many levels to offer. While you can have any number from two (a "low-powered" and "high-powered" version of each ability) to two dozen, I've found that five levels works well. It offers enough variety to keep things fun, while ensuring that there's a significant difference between what the different power levels can do.

After determining your power range, you want to figure out what those power levels mean to you -- as well as approximately how much each level should cost. You'll probably need to adjust these a few times as you work out each ability, but it's good to start off with guidelines. For five levels, the following seems logical:

1. *Weak.* For a psi who only wants the ability as a backup power. Should cost around 10-15 points.
2. *Underpowered.* A good level for secondary abilities for any starting psi. Should cost around 15-25 points.
3. *Average.* Good enough to be a psi's primary ability if he has other talents. Should cost around 25-35 points.
4. *Powerful.* Good enough to be a psi's primary ability even if he can't do much else. Should cost around 40-50 points.
5. *Dominating.* The level of ability that psionic characters will be hoping to reach. Should cost around 60-70 points.

This progression is somewhat slanted towards 100 to 200 point psis. In a four-color supers game, it would make sense to add another five levels and keep going -- all the way into levels costing hundreds of points each!

Once you've established your guidelines, it's time to decide what abilities are available. Think about the classic tropes of each psionic power and what you want psis of each flavor to be able to accomplish . . . or just steal brazenly from the old *GURPS Psionics.* Bear in mind that, in some cases, it will make sense to combine abilities (see Mental Blow, below, for an example) or even to split one into two or more. For example, the old Telekinesis ability, with all of its special tricks from *GURPS Psionics,* could be split into "External TK" (Telekinesis, to pick someone up), "Internal TK" (Crushing Attack with Malediction, to squeeze someone's organs), and "Projectile TK" (Piercing Attack with Accessibility: Requires Small Rocks, to fling pebbles at the speed of bullets).

Finally, all that remains is putting it together. For each ability, decide what the power levels mean to you and build them. It can be intimidating at first, but is easier than it seems. Some advice:

It will usually be easy to choose the base advantage, but certain cases may be tricky. Don't hesitate to combine advantages, or even to replace one advantage with another as you rise in power level, as long as it makes sense for *that psionic ability.* Think of it as "upgrading" from one advantage to the other as the character advances. (See Illusion, below, for an example.)

For the lower levels (Power 1 and 2), most advantages will need to be limited to reduce their effectiveness and fit the point budget. Judicious use of Contact Agent, Costs Fatigue, Racial (or an equivalent Accessibility or Specialized), Sense-Based, Short-Range, Takes Extra Time, Takes Recharge, and Temporary Disadvantage can help keep costs down, and are all appropriate for the psionic genre.

By Power 3, you want the ability to be fairly unrestricted for normal use, though it's okay if it lacks certain frills. In higher levels (Power 4 and 5), try to work in whatever neat specialized enhancements the base advantage offers or, perhaps, add another related advantage. If the second advantage compliments the use of the primary one, join them together via Link or Follow-Up. If the second advantage is more of a "powered-up" version of the primary, you can save points by making it an Alternative Ability (*Powers,* p. 11). In such a case, you can only use one of the advantages at a time (and must take a second to switch between them unless they're both attacks), but you get the less expensive one for 1/5 cost!

If you can't seem to build an ability on the point scale you've allotted, perhaps because the base advantage is too expensive, you have some options. If it's close, you may wish to change your guidelines to accommodate it. If not, it may be simpler to just establish a second set of "power level guidelines" for it; see Telecontrol, below, for an example of this.

A fully worked example of this process, Telepathy Power, appears below.

. . . and Tempered by Skill

Using psionic skills gives the game a very different feel than rolling against attributes does. Players have far more control over how well their character handles his psi, from near-incompetence to mastery. And it's a simple thing to add.

The optional *Skills for Everyone* sidebox on p. 162 of *Powers* has rules for "power skills" -- skills which represent the training required to properly use one's superhuman abilities. If the psi would normally roll against IQ to use his abilities, he instead rolls against an IQ/H skill. Talent adds to the skill, of course, and the point cost of the ability is unaffected. The drawback of having to buy an additional skill is more than balanced out by the potential to raise one's skill level far beyond the limits of "attribute plus Talent".

Note that only one skill should be required per psionic ability, regardless of how many advantages comprise that one ability. For example, telepathic eavesdroppers buy a single Telereceive skill as opposed to buying separate Mind Reading and Mind Probe skills. This is both simpler and truer to the genre, in which reading other people's thoughts *and* memories is really one ability, not two. Because of this, if an ability consists of more than one advantage, it's important to make sure that they all roll against the same attribute. If they don't, use Based on (Different Attribute) to correct that.

Putting It Together: Telepathy

What follows is a worked example for Telepathy Power. It revisits most of the telepathic abilities from *GURPS Psionics,* though with a few changes. Mindswitch seemed to work out better as a lower level of Telecontrol, for example, and Mental Blow has subsumed Mental Stab and Sleep. Note that the type of Social Regard used for Aspect will depend on the telepath's avatar.

Telecontrol is a good example of adjusting point limits. Because Possession is such an expensive advantage, there was no way to do Telecontrol justice on the same point budget as the others. Rather than crippling it or artificially inflating the power (and point cost) of every other telepathic ability, the point guidelines for Telecontrol were set at twice that of the other abilities. This way, a player building a psi can easily tell that taking Telecontrol is the equivalent of taking any other *two* telepathic powers.

The Telereceive, Telesend, Aspect, Suggestion and Telecontrol skills are all IQ/H (default IQ-6); the Illusion, Mind Shield and Mental Blow skills are Will/H (default Will-6); and the Telescan skill is Per/H (default Per-6). Telepathy Talent adds to all of these.

Telepathic Abilities

Telereceive: 12, 21, 35, 50 or 65 points

1. You can read another human's surface thoughts for as long as you remain in contact with them. You must touch their bare skin to do so and win a contest of your Telereceive skill versus Will. If you do not speak their language, you will only pick up on non-verbal cues such as emotions and urges. *Mind Reading (Contact Agent, -30%; Racial, -20%; Telepathic, -10%) [12]*
2. You can read thoughts at a distance, subtracting normal range penalties from your skill roll. *Mind Reading (Racial, -20%; Telepathic, -10%) [21]*
3. You can also go beyond surface thoughts, probing the subconscious mind for answers to questions. Roll a new contest for each question; repeated questions are at a cumulative -2 penalty. *Mind Probe (Racial, -20%; Telepathic, -10%) [14]; Mind Reading (Racial, -20%; Telepathic, -10%) [21]*
4. You can stay in contact with multiple people simultaneously. Your skill roll to contact a new person is at a cumulative -1 penalty for each person you're already linked to. You can only read one mind at a time, but you can switch between them with no roll and will notice if one of them is intentionally trying to get your attention. *Mind Probe (Racial, -20%; Telepathic, -10%) [14]; Mind Reading (Multiple Contacts, +50%; Racial, -20%; Telepathic, -10%) [36]*
5. You can read minds at incredible range. Subtract Long Distance Modifiers (p. B241) from your skill instead of normal range penalties. *Mind Probe (Racial, -20%; Telepathic, -10%) [14]; Mind Reading (Long Range 1, +50%; Multiple Contacts, +50%; Racial, -20%; Telepathic, -10%) [51]*

Telesend: 15, 18, 33, 45 or 60 points

1. You can transmit your thoughts to any nearby person. Roll your Telesend skill, at -1 per yard between you and the recipient; if you cannot see him, additional penalties apply (see p. B91). *Telesend (Racial, -20%; Short Range 2, -20%; Telepathic, -10%) [15]*
2. Your Telesend roll uses normal range penalties instead of being at -1 per yard. *Telesend (Racial, -20%; Short Range 1, -10%; Telepathic, -10%) [18]*
3. You can broadcast to everyone within a given range, at an extra -4 to your skill roll. *Telesend (Broadcast, +50%; Racial, -20%; Short-Range 1, -10%; Telepathic, -10%) [33]*
4. You can share your sense of sight with a willing subject as well as your thoughts, transmitting everything you can see. *Telesend (Broadcast, +50%; Racial, -20%; Short-Range 1, -10%; Telepathic, -10%; Video, +40%) [45]*
5. You can share all of your senses, not just sight! If the recipient(s) are willing, they can experience everything that you do, in real time. Your range is also increased greatly; apply Long Distance Modifiers (p. B241) to your skill roll instead of normal range penalties. *Telesend (Broadcast, +50%; Racial, -20%; Sensie, +80%; Telepathic, -10%) [60]*

Mind Shield: 13, 22, 36, 44 or 62 points

1. A mental barrier protects you from other psis intruding upon your mind. You get +4 to your quick contest against any mental intrusion (see p. B70 for details). In addition, when anyone attempts to locate your mind, you may roll against your Mind Shield skill (with the same +4 bonus) to resist it. You may voluntarily raise or lower your shield on your turn; it does not interfere with your own psi use. *Mind Shield 4 (Cannot Power Block, -10%; Telepathic, -10%) [13]*

2. Your bonus to resist mental invasion becomes +6. In addition, you can attempt to "power block" such attacks with your shield (once per turn). Make a separate roll against (Mind Shield skill)/2 + 3. Success means that your bonus is doubled (to +12) for the roll to resist the intrusion! However, failure means that your Mind Shield adds *nothing* to this one resistance roll. *Mind Shield 6 (Telepathic, -10%) [22]*

3. You now have +8 (doubled as usual for a "power block") to resist. In addition, you no longer have to lower your shield if you want to let a friend into your mind; you can create an opening for him without giving anyone else access. *Mind Shield 8 (Selective Effect, +20%; Telepathic, -10%) [36]*

4. Only the most skilled telepaths can penetrate your defenses. Your shield gives you +10 to resist attacks (+20 with a "power block")! *Mind Shield 10 (Selective Effect, +20%; Telepathic, -10%) [44]*

5. With effort, you can extend part of your mental defenses to protect those around you as well. This costs two fatigue points and lasts for one minute, during which time any of your friends in skin-to-skin contact with you have +5 to resist any intrusion. If you choose to "power block" (they cannot), their bonus is doubled as well (to +10) on a success and reduced to +0 on a failure. *Mind Shield 5 (Selective Effect, +20%; Telepathic, -10%) [22]; Mind Shield +5 (Affects Others, Area Effect 1, and Force Field, limited by Costs Fatigue, 2 FP, and Contact Agent, +88%; Selective Effect, +20%; Telepathic, -10%) [40]*

Aspect: 12, 20, 34, 44 or 68 points

1. You can exude a force of will that makes others notice you. Roll against your Aspect skill to use this ability; everyone in your immediate vicinity resists with their Will. (You may exclude anyone that you wish.) Everyone who fails reacts to you at +3 for as long as you remain near them and do nothing to upset them. Subjects can build up a resistance to your Aspect if you use it too much; victims are at +1 to their Will for every time you've affected them within 24 hours. *Social Regard +3 (Nuisance Effect, Subjects build resistance, -5%; Requires IQ roll, -10%; Resistible, Will, Quick Contest -15%; Selective Area, +20%; Telepathic, -10%) [12]*

2. Those affected react to you at +5. In addition, you project an "avatar", a subliminal image or emotion related to your personality. Unless you choose to hide it, everyone affected by your Aspect will sense this avatar and associate it with you. (A critical failure when hiding one's image causes it to be projected into everyone's mind in the most negative way possible.) *Perk (Mental avatar) [1]; Social Regard +5 (Nuisance Effect, Subjects build resistance, -5%; Requires IQ roll, -10%; Resistible, Will, Quick Contest, -15%; Selective Area, +20%; Telepathic, -10%) [20]*

3. Your reaction bonus is doubled (to +10) among those who find your gender attractive! *Perk (Mental avatar) [1]; Social Regard +5 (Doubled for opposite sex, +50%; Nuisance Effect, Subjects build resistance, -5%; Requires IQ roll, -10%; Resistible, Will, Quick Contest, -15%; Selective Area, +20%; Telepathic, -10%) [33]*

4. Instead of affecting those around you, you can focus your full Aspect onto a single person, overwhelming him with awe. He must be within 100 yards and able to either see or hear you. Roll against Aspect skill; your subject makes a Fright Check at a penalty equal to the amount you succeeded by. If he fails, roll 3d, add the result he failed by, and look up the result (as Awe) on the *Awe and Confusion Check Table* (**Powers,** p. 85). *Perk (Mental avatar) [1]; Awe (Alternative Ability, x1; Active, +0%; Increased Range x10, +30%; Telepathic, -10%) [36]; Social Regard +5 (Alternative Ability, x1/5; Doubled for opposite sex, +50%; Nuisance Effect, Subjects build resistance, -5%; Requires IQ roll, -10%; Resistible, Will, Quick Contest, -15%; Selective Area, +20%; Telepathic, -10%) [7]*

5. Your victims no longer develop a resistance, no matter how often you use this ability on them. In addition, you can awe everyone around you! This requires no skill roll and affects everyone who can see you. They must immediately make an unmodified Fright Check or suffer the appropriate result from the Awe table. As always, you may exclude whoever you wish. *Perk (Mental avatar) [1]; Awe (Alternative Ability, x1; Active, +0%; Cosmic, No bonus for repeated Fright Checks, +50%; Increased Range x10, +30%; Selective Area, +20%; Selectivity, +10%; Telepathic, -10%) [60]; Social Regard +5 (Alternative Ability, x1/5; Doubled for opposite sex, +50%; Requires IQ roll, -10%; Resistible, Will, Quick Contest, -15%; Selective Area, +20%; Telepathic, -*

10%) [7]

Note: If you don't have **GURPS Powers,** look up any failed Awe rolls on the Fright Check table (p. B360); it's close enough.

Illusion: 12, 25, 33, 48 or 66 points

1. You can disrupt a person's senses, flooding them with random images and sounds. This requires no skill roll, just one second of skin-to-skin contact. The victim can make a Will roll to resist. If he fails, his senses are overwhelmed (treat as hallucinating, p. B428) for one minute per point of failure, after which he recovers completely. *Affliction 1 (Will; Based on Will, +20%; Contact Agent, -30%; Hallucinating, +50%; No Stunning, -10%; Telepathic, -10%) [12]*
2. You can affect your target at a distance. Roll a quick contest of Illusion skill versus the victim's Will; you are at a -1 penalty for each yard to the subject. *Affliction 1 (Will; Based on Will, +20%; Hallucinating, +50%; Malediction 1, +100%; No Stunning, -10%; Telepathic, -10%) [25]*
3. Subtract normal range penalties (instead of -1 per yard) when affecting someone. Also, if you win the contest by more than 5, you have the option of removing any of your subject's senses instead of (or in addition to) making him hallucinate! *Affliction 1 (Will; Based on Will, +20%; Hallucinating, +50%; Malediction 2, +150%; No Stunning, -10%; Secondary Disadvantages, Blindness, Deafness, No Sense of Smell/Taste, Numb, +19%; Selectivity, +10%; Telepathic, -10%) [33]*
4. You can take complete control of your victim's perceptions. You can make him sense anything you wish (this cannot cause damage, knockdown, etc.), including nothing at all! Changing the illusion requires concentration. Duration is unlimited, but you are at a cumulative -1 penalty for every subject already under your control. *Illusion (Based on Will to use, +20%; Mental, +100%; Short-Range 2, -20%; Telepathic, -10%) [48]*
5. You can overload your subject's sensory input so strongly that they take damage. This requires intense concentration; you can only attempt it once every five seconds and have no active defenses on any turn in which you do so. Roll another quick contest of Illusion skill versus Will; on a success, the subject takes damage equal to your margin of victory. *Illusion (Based on Will to use, +20%; Mental, +100%; Short-Range 2, -20%; Stigmata limited by All-Out and Takes Recharge, +72%; Telepathic, -10%) [66]*

Mental Blow: 15, 21, 31, 48 or 66 points

1. You can attack another person's neurological system with your mind. You must have line-of-sight to them with your naked eye (the GM may require a vision roll if unsure) and win a quick contest of your Mental Blow skill (at -1 per yard of distance between you) versus their HT. If you win, they are physically stunned and must roll HT every second to recover. *Affliction 1 (HT; Accessibility, Only Humans, -20%; Malediction 1, +100%; Sense-Based, Vision, Reversed, -20%; Telepathic, -10%) [15]*
2. Your attack uses normal range penalties instead of being at -1 per yard. In addition, any victim who loses the quick contest by 5 or more is dazed (p. B428) for minutes equal to the margin, and then stunned (as above) afterward! *Affliction 1 (HT; Accessibility, Only Humans, -20%; Malediction 2, +150%; Secondary Dazed, +10%; Sense-Based, Vision, Reversed, -20%; Telepathic, -10%) [21]*
3. Those affected are automatically dazed for minutes equal to your margin of victory. If they lose by 5 or more, they fall unconscious (for the same duration) instead. Either way, they're stunned once they recover. You can also target opponents via indirect methods (e.g., seeing them via a live video feed) or if you know *exactly* where they are. *Affliction 1 (HT; Accessibility, Only Humans, -20%; Dazed, +50%; Malediction 2, +150%; Secondary Unconsciousness, +40%; Telepathic, -10%) [31]*
4. In addition to being dazed or knocked out, your victims immediately lose 1d-1 fatigue points if they fail to resist. *Affliction 1 (HT; Accessibility, Only Humans, -20%; Dazed, +50%; Malediction 2, +150%; Secondary Unconsciousness, +40%; Telepathic, -10%) [31]; Fatigue Attack 1d-1 (Follow-Up, Affliction, +150%; Telepathic, -10%) [17]*
5. Your victims now take 1d+1 damage when affected -- and you decide (before attacking) whether it comes off of their fatigue points or their hit points! *Affliction 1 (HT; Accessibility, Only Humans, -20%; Dazed, +50%; Malediction 2, +150%; Secondary Unconsciousness, +40%; Telepathic, -10%) [31]; Fatigue Attack 1d+1*

(Alternative Attack, x1; Follow-Up, Affliction, +150%; Telepathic, -10%) [32]; Toxic Attack 1d+1 (Alternative Attack, x1/5; Follow-Up, Affliction, +150%; Telepathic, -10%) [3]

Suggestion: 10, 20, 35, 45 or 60 points

1. You can verbally give one person a *simple* suggestion (see the Suggest skill on p. B191 for guidelines), which they will do their best to follow. Roll a quick contest of your Suggestion skill (minus normal range penalties) versus their Will. If you win, your control lasts for as long as you concentrate, then for minutes equal to your margin of victory. The GM may give the person extra resistance rolls for dangerous or repugnant suggestions. If you use this ability on a different person or fall unconscious, your victim regains his senses immediately. *Mind Control (Accessibility, Only Humans, -20%; Cannot Affect Multiple Subjects, -10%; Sense-Based, Hearing, -20%; Suggestion, -40%; Telepathic, -10%) [10]*

2. You can give your target complex and specific commands, not just vague suggestions. *Mind Control (Accessibility, Only Humans, -20%; Cannot Affect Multiple Subjects, -10%; Sense-Based, Hearing, -20%; Telepathic, -10%) [20]*

3. You can control more than one person, though you can only assume control of one person at a time. You are at -1 to skill for every subject already under your control, and any critical failure frees them all instantly. You can also choose to send your commands telepathically and thus silently. *Mind Control (Accessibility, Only Humans, -20%; Telepathic, -10%) [35]*

4. Once you have the subject controlled, you can rewrite their mental programming as well. Roll a second quick contest; your Suggestion skill is at -1 for every -5 points in disadvantages being added (and -1 for every *other* person currently under your control.) Each attempt takes one minute of constant concentration. The disadvantages last for days equal to your margin of victory; see p. B69 for details. *Mind Control (Accessibility, Only Humans, -20%; Conditioning, limited with Takes Extra Time x6, +20%; Telepathic, -10%) [45]*

5. As above, but fast! Each attempt takes only one second. *Mind Control (Accessibility, Only Humans, -20%; Conditioning, +50%; Telepathic, -10%) [60]*

Telescan: 12, 17, 31, 43 or 63 points

1. By remaining perfectly still and concentrating deeply, you can mentally search the surrounding area for a specific person's mind. Specify who you are looking for; it must be someone you have used your Telepathy on or have had frequent interactions with. The GM will roll your Telescan skill, at normal range penalties to the subject. On a success, you know the exact location of the subject and can target them with any telepathic abilities that do not require line-of-sight. This ability requires you to be completely immobile; it will not work in a moving vehicle, for example, and you get no active defense if attacked while using it. *Detect (Known Human Minds; Only finds the single mind specified, -20%; Precise, +100%; Telepathic, -10%; Temporary Disadvantage, Sessile, -50%) [12]*

2. Instead of specifying one person, you can scan the area for everyone that you know. The GM will look up the amount your Telescan roll succeeded by on the Speed/Range table (p. B550) and tell you the location of any and all people that you know within that range. Each turn, you can make a second, "follow-up scan" skill roll on any one person to identify them. You can now move while using this skill, but due to intense concentration, you are still defenseless if attacked in mid-scan. *Detect (Known Human Minds; All-Out, -25%; Precise, +100%; Telepathic, -10%) [17]*

3. Your scan can detect all human minds within range, known or otherwise. You can still make a follow-up skill roll to identify a known mind, but unknown minds are merely faceless positions. This does not prevent you from targeting them with appropriate psionic abilities, of course. *Detect (Human Minds; All-Out, -25%; Cannot analyze unknown minds, -10%; Precise, +100%; Telepathic, -10%) [31]*

4. You can search far and wide; your searches and scans use the Long-Distance Modifiers (p. B241) instead of the normal range penalties. In addition, you can make a second, follow-up roll on unknown minds. If successful, you learn basic information (e.g., "white male in his 30s"). *Detect (Human Minds; All-Out, -25%; Long-Range 1, +50%; Precise, +100%; Telepathic, -10%) [43]*

5. With one scan, you receive both the location and details of everyone within range, as if you had done a "follow-up scan" on all of them. You can then make a additional Telescan rolls to get even more information: the status

of a known person (e.g., "he's wounded and under attack") or the details of an unknown one (e.g., "she's an accountant named Tina Dobbs"), though only a critical success will reveal a secret identity. *Detect (Human Minds; All-Out, -25%; Analyzing, +100%; Long-Range 1, +50%; Precise, +100%; Telepathic, -10%) [63]*

Telecontrol: 20, 37, 67, 97 and 130

1. You can switch bodies with another person by concentrating for a turn and touching him. If you win a quick contest of Telecontrol skill versus Will (Will+5 if he's suspicious of your actions), you control his body, but he also controls yours. You each gain the other's physical abilities and retain your own mental ones -- see p. B75 for details. However, all of *your* attribute and skill rolls (except passive rolls for resistance, survival, etc.) are made at -1 due to the unfamiliar body and neurons. *Possession (Mind Swap, +10%; No Memory Access, -10%; Specialized, Humans Only, -40%; Telepathic, -10%; Temporary Disadvantage, -1 to all attribute/skill rolls, -33%*) [20]*

2. You can body-snatch at a distance; you may target any human being within 20 yards, at normal range penalties. *Possession (Mind Swap, +10%; No Memory Access, -10%; Ranged, +40%; Reduced Range 1/5, -20%; Specialized, Humans Only, -40%; Telepathic, -10%; Temporary Disadvantage, -1 to all attribute/skill rolls, -33%*) [37]*

3. Your Telepathy is strong enough to displace your subject's mind without giving them control over your body. While you control their body, yours remains in a trance; when your control ends, you come to, physically stunned (roll HT every second to recover). *Possession (Backlash, Stunning, -10%; No Memory Access, -10%; Ranged, +40%; Reduced Range 1/5, -20%; Specialized, Humans Only, -40%; Telecontrol, +50%; Telepathic, -10%; Temporary Disadvantage, -1 to all attribute/skill rolls, -33%*) [67]*

4. You can take a person over from up to 100 yards away. In addition, when you are finished, you awaken in your body immediately, alert and unstunned. *Possession (No Memory Access, -10%; Ranged, +40%; Specialized, Humans Only, -40%; Telecontrol, +50%; Telepathic, -10%; Temporary Disadvantage, -1 to all attribute/skill rolls, -33%*) [97]*

5. You adapt fully enough to suffer no penalties to attribute or skill rolls when borrowing someone's body. *Possession (No Memory Access, -10%; Ranged, +40%; Specialized, Humans Only, -40%; Telecontrol, +50%; Telepathic, -10%) [130]*

* This is treated as a -42 point meta-trait: ST -1 (Success rolls only, -50%) [-5]; DX -1 [-20]; IQ -1 [-20]; HT -1 (Active success rolls only, -80%) [-2], Basic Speed +0.25 [5]. Its value as a limitation has been adjusted to meet the "80% rule" on p. B115.

Keeping It Simple

With the complex, open-ended psionic system reduced to a clear, concise list, even first-time players will find it easy to pick and choose their psionic abilities. The simplest way to present this to them is to delete all of the game mechanics (in italics) and present the list to your players. Let them buy each psi ability as a self-contained advantage (e.g., "Suggestion 3 [35]") and take the appropriate skill for each.

If you believe your group would prefer a system even more straightforward and symmetrical, you can try this (strictly optional) approach: Average the costs for each level and come up with a simple, unified table for buying psionics. Don't worry about rounding errors; a point or two either way won't break anything.

Here's an example based on the Telepathy skills above:

Psionic Abilities

Power	*Cost**
1	12
2	20
3	33

4	45
5	65

* Double cost for Telecontrol

This has the effect of making psionics feel like more of a system, rather than a collection of abilities. It may not be right for every group, though, especially with players who want to know *exactly* where every one of their points is going.

The Results, Please . . .

A streamlined psionic system, based around universal concepts like power and skill, will make it easy for anyone to get into the game. New players will find the "shopping list" approach simple and nonthreatening, while experienced players will appreciate the options. Even expert rules tinkerers will find the worked examples useful as something to tweak to their heart's content. The net effect is that it lets everyone focus less on how to build their psi and more on roleplaying, which is always a good thing.

* * *

The Great Dice Source

He wafted in on a breeze of Doritos and Mountain Dew, wearing a weasel's mustache and possessing a voice two octaves too high for his ample bulk. That was my first meeting with the infamous Les Cheddarblok, dice king of the Rocky Mountain region. There were few who could surpass his desire for dice. Or his willingness to increase his collection no matter the means. I had heard rumors and I wanted them to stay just that -- rumors.

"I'm looking for Ms. Barnhorst. The Dice Detective," he said as I looked up from my stool behind the counter.

"You're looking at her, bud," I growled. "Whaddya want?"

"Lucky told me I might find you here. Said that you might be able to help me with a little dice mystery."

"Lucky? What does he know about dice? He ain't rolled a natural 20 since he caused that total party wipeout in '02."

Cheddarblok stared at me. "If I understand Lucky correctly, he wasn't the only one responsible for that debacle." I winced. I could never live down the shame. The past is like deadbeat ex-boyfriends. Just when you think you've paid the piper with them, they come back with another debt that you owe. He continued, "I'm willing to pay well."

"And if you've been gabbing with Lucky then you know I'm out of the business. I ain't taking any new cases."

"I bet that you will after you see what I have."

A regular wandered into the store.

"I got customers to help and you ain't one of them, Mister."

C.W., a blond Pillsbury Dough Boy with a perpetually dissatisfied attitude, was one of those customers that made me want to take a hammer and smash my own skull with it. We had had our disagreements and I would have been happy if his oily shadow had never darkened our doorway again.

I addressed C.W., "You can't take a hint?"

"Did you know that the store domain name has been bought?"

"Yeah. . . we bought it ourselves. Kind of useful for us so that we can use it with our website. Why do you ask?"

"I checked. I figured that if someone hadn't already bought it, I could buy it and then make you buy it from me. Oh, by the way, you guys hiring? You have an application I can fill out?"

I turned my back on him, fruitlessly hoping that he would get the hint and skedaddle but he wandered into the miniatures aisle instead. There was enough clutter back there that he might get lost for several days. I wasn't even sure what forgotten treasures he might find and I was fervently hoping that Black Pudding might find him instead. But then I heard a sound that I could not ignore, the sound of dice rolling. I shuddered and turned to face Cheddarblok. He had emptied a velvet-lined dice bag onto the counter. His fingertips, stained orange from years of Cheetos consumption, lightly stroked the pearls of gaming that he had thrown onto my front counter. I had vowed never to touch a polyhedral again but I moved forward when I saw what he had brought to me. Red and blue cubes of plastic sparkled as if lit with an inner vitality. My senses dimmed as I stared at them. Dice. My doom. My downfall. I could never forget the disaster I had caused when I had given into my greed for these babies.

"What are these to me, Cheddarblok?" My casual air didn't fool Les. He smiled out of the side of his mouth.

"Beautiful, aren't they? I acquired them some years back. But I am missing the eight-sider and the 10-sider. I've searched for years. I've sent agents investigating worldwide but I've exhausted all my resources. You are my last

option."

Some option, I thought to myself and I could tell that the Rocky Mountain Dice King agreed with me. Cheddarblok knew that he had me -- I needed to stall for time so I welcomed the interruption when another customer, the one we simply knew as Red Shirt Boy, approached us with awe in his face.

"Dice . . . these dice, they're the real thing, aren't they? I bet you if I had these kind of dice, I would never lose another character." Reluctantly he pulled his gaze from the shining cubes and addressed me. Ms. Barnhorst, ma'am, I have a *D&D* question for you."

"Don't you have a bus to catch?"

"I missed it. I can catch the next one."

"Haven't you heard? I don't do rules. Everyone knows that and I don't know how to play *D&D.* I'm the wrong person to ask." I don't have to tell this pipsqueak about that fateful day in '02. In those days, I was someone big in the gaming world around here. Gamers from all around knew that I was the One, the One who knew everything there was to know about rules, and I would sit in judgment of many a rules dispute.

"But it isn't actually a question so much as advice."

"You don't know who you are talking to. My advice don't come cheap, boy."

Red Shirt Boy plowed on. "I've always played *D&D* with miniatures but now I am playing with a *GURPS* group and they've never played with miniatures. They just keep everything in their head but when I am GMing I just can't keep it straight."

"Make them play with miniatures." I could feel Cheddarblok hovering, the dice calling me, and suddenly they seemed like welcome old friends.

"There's this other group that I play with and they didn't think that I could run an eight-foot Chinese ninja wearing a black cloak in the desert. Of course, when I fell out of the tree onto the fire and burned my cloak . . . " I refrained from asking about the tree in the middle of the desert and addressed the Dice King instead.

"If I take a look, tell you what I know, you'll leave me alone, right?"

He looked around at the dusty, nearly deserted store. This place had been big once, I mean really big, but it had declined as I had. The two of us, companions in decrepit destitution.

"To all this?" He asked with a sardonic twist to his lips.

"Yeah, to all this. Wanna make something of it?" I challenged him. He didn't answer me. "I help you and you leave me alone from now on, pal. We got us a deal?"

He nodded. I turned my attention to the dice and concentrated for a time. It could have been two minutes or two years. Red Shirt Boy had spied C.W. in the miniatures aisle and sidled up to him, never stopping his story about the misadventures of the Chinese Ninja. I welcomed the silence as it dropped over me as my hands moved of their own volition. I needed to touch the dice. I noticed a small child clutching a deck of *Yu Gi Oh* cards standing at my elbow.

"Where did you come from? There isn't a tournament today."

"Don't do it, ma'am. You'll regret it for the rest of your days. Don't do it."

"This ain't no place for a tadpole like you. Get out of here." My voice had thickened. I stared into the child's eyes and then I turned back to the dice, knowing even then that I was doing wrong.

"Don't do it." The child's voice had grown faint but I put that down to an addiction to the ink on the *Yu Gi Oh* cards he held. It was the only theory I had ever been able to come up that could explain these children's irrational devotion to such a non-game.

I forced myself to pick the dice up. They were cool in my hands yet burned with an inner fire. The polyhedral sets were identical in type except one was deep red and the other royal blue. My expert eye winced to see their perfection marred by their missing fellows. These little gems were valuable but their price would rise astronomically if the sets could be completed.

"Hmmm, the swirl pattern reminds me of Crystal Caste's Ice Cream series but they never did anything in these deep colors . . . and look at the numbers. Small, much smaller than what is being done now. With black ink for the numbers too. Black hasn't been used for dice like this since the early days of dice production in the 80s. No, these babies are old, really old."

"I know all this," the Cheddarblok agreed. "What else?"

"Nothing like this is coming out of the major manufacturers these days. Not Koplow, and not Chessex. The ink color is completely wrong for Crystal Caste -- they've been going with that teal color that everyone hates. Not Zocchi. The edges are too rounded." I looked up. "An independent? You got some rogue dicemaker working for you, Mr. Cheddarblok?"

"These aren't forgeries." He became agitated, pacing up and down the store aisles. I had given him what he wanted and now it was time for him to honor his part of the deal and exit this aging establishment. It, and I, had some decaying to get on with. I leaned back on my stool and pretended to go to sleep. I didn't think I was being too subtle.

He stopped and turned to me. "What if I told you that I think that these dice are special. That they are the motherlode themselves. That they come from the Great Dice Source, itself."

The Great Dice Source? That was a myth. There was no Great Dice Source. But then I thought about Red Shirt Boy's nearly primeval response to the dice when he had seen them. His character story had fountained from him. What if all the fables were true? What kind of effect would something like these dice have on real gamers?

Suddenly Red Shirt Boy piped up from somewhere in the stacks. "I was wondering if you had any job openings?"

"Nope, not right now."

"You always say that."

"Shuddup, will ya?"

I turned back to Les, "The Great Dice Source? You've been reading too many bedtime stories, Mr. Cheddarblok. You need to get some reality into your head."

"But I have evidence to the contrary . . . and a map. Just think. All the dice your heart could desire and they only roll the numbers you want them to. The gamer who possesses access to the Great Dice Source would be a wealthy beyond his wildest dreams."

"Or something like that." I was already caught in Cheddarblok's web and thus I had begun my downfall. My years at the store were waning and I would diminish and go into the West. Or the East depending on where the map sent me. I would listen to the Dice King's blandishments and set off on a journey beyond my craziest imaginings, a journey that would eventually lead to the downfall of gaming, itself.

But that is another story.

Pyramid Review

Raub Ritter

Published by Queen Games

Created by Rüdiger Dorn

Graphics by Michael Menzel

96 tiles in four colors, 120 tokens in four colors, rules; full-color, boxed, 2-4 players; $19.95

You know how it is when you're sitting on top of the medieval food chain and your class has got it all: You want to add what others of your class have to your own pile. ***Raub Ritter*** (Robber Knights) is a game for two to four players of stealing away everyone else's property while protecting your own lands.

The object of the game is to score the most points for the towns you possess at the end of the game.

The countryside is composed of the landscape tiles everyone plays. Each player has his own stack, identified on the back by colored coats-of-arms, but once placed they're fair game for anyone to spread out on. Tiles are also labeled A through E, indicating the order in which they're drawn from your deck, though you can only play one of the three tiles that form your hand. This gives you a little leeway for choosing what to place first. Over the course of a turn, you'll play one to three tiles, drawing a new one as you go. Each new placement has to abut a tile someone already played side-by-side, but the playing field only expands until it forms a square. This is 10 tiles on a side for a four-player game, but no one knows the extent of the lands until the rows and columns are actually played. You may want to expand on this side of the mountains, but someone else may stretch things out on his end of the board, and once you get to 10 tiles in any direction, expansion stops . . . time to expand the other direction.

The countryside has three kinds of settlement: towns, villages, and castles, worth three, two, and one points respectively. There are also three kinds of terrain that affect the movement of knights: plains, forests, and mountains. When you set down one of your castles, you may put zero to five knight tokens on it (your supply is limited to 30 counters). These men move in a straight line from the castle, so you should make sure they have someplace adjacent to go before you drop them in. Once placed and moved, they stay put for the rest of the game.

When knights set out, they must leave tokens behind. A plains space requires one knight remain there; forests take two; and mountains eat up three of your stack. Since you only get points for the buildings, it's better if you place tiles containing those features for your knights to occupy -- empty landscape spaces just eat up your limited supply of knight tokens. Only the faction whose token is topmost on a stack at the end of the game gets points for that structure, so being first isn't always the best -- going in a later round lets you stack your tokens atop the old ones.

There's a four-token maximum, though, and everyone must obey the terrain requirement for leaving men behind. If you play two tokens on a forest space, the next player can and must leave two as well to make his mark there. If you put three knights on a forest space, though, the next person can't place the requisite two-token minimum without exceeding the five-token maximum. Mountains make good obstacles for these reasons, and everyone gets a lake tile that can be used to block. Play continues until the grid is filled out -- whether you have knights left to play or not -- at which point the top token on each building is determined and points assigned to their owners.

The components are simple and straightforward -- tiles and tokens -- but for all that they're still good work. You get wooden counters for the knights, and thick, colorful little tiles for the landscape. The towns and castles can start to look alike if you're not careful, especially if you allow yourself to be distracted by the terrain that surrounds them, and

you have to look at the illustration rather than the colors.

The rules are presented well, though getting all the math involved with token placement is your first big challenge. There are a lot of strategic options, but some players will find there are just too many to consider -- play can extend in several directions, and not just from tile placement. Hemming in another player is almost impossible, and sometimes your best bet is to play conservatively and try not to make as many mistakes as your opponents.

On the other hand, anyone who enjoys an expansive game will love curling up with ***Raub Ritter*** (and curling their head around the many possibilities), and perhaps the long view that accommodates a long learning curve is what will keep such a game fresh.

--Andy Vetromile

Practical Divination

Tricks for GMs

by Chris Wong Sick Hong

Most GMs are familiar with the following scene: after completing a great and arduous task, the players are permitted to ask one question of the oracle. Or they cast a spell which gives an answer of "yes" or "no" to a single query. And with a cleverly worded question and a gleam in their eyes, the players learn the one piece of information that turns the next few sessions from a Herculean labor worthy of their efforts into a cakewalk.

Most people enjoy a challenge, and turning a main encounter of the campaign into a walkthrough is unlikely to satisfy anyone's gaming urges. Players come to the table to do great things, not have fame and fortune handed to them on a silver platter. Unless, of course, getting the information itself was a triumph into which they put their blood, sweat, and tears. In that case, the challenge was not defeating the bad guy per se, but acquiring all the information necessary to do so. (This theme is especially common against near-omnipotent foes.)

But if the fight is meant to be challenging, there are still many options. To be consistent, however, which one you choose depends on the conceptual framework behind divination in your campaign. Where does the information come from? How specific and complete is the information gleaned? Is divination fallible? Together, the answers to these questions can not only provide solutions, but adventure hooks as well.

Technology offers insights into the nature of divination. Spy-planes, satellite photos, and even cell phones offer ways for people to learn about things far distant from their current location. To a medieval peasant, calling someone in Tucson to ask about the weather is powerful magic. The possibilities increase the higher on the tech scale you go. Thanks to quantum mechanics, you get things like being in two places at once and that old favorite, time travel.

A good way to handle divination in low-tech worlds is to compare it to its higher tech analogues. Asking the gods is equivalent to asking some superior race for help. Remote viewing becomes satellite recon. Telling the future stays the same, but the input of quantum mechanics can raise some interesting questions, such as whether or not the players are actually causing the future by viewing it prematurely. And time travelers are always interesting sources of information.

Anything that can go wrong with higher tech versions of information gathering can also happen in low-tech worlds. The gods are unhelpful or don't actually know everything. Remote viewing is blocked by a malicious presence. Time travelers with their own agendas try to influence the players by giving faulty information. Any adventure hook that focuses on intelligence gathering can be altered to work with divination in fantasy campaigns.

But by far the most important question about divination, game-wise, is whether it is accurate. If it isn't completely so, that always leaves outs. Perhaps the party learns the lunar wizard loses his power on the new moon. But since the wizard knows that too, he's stored some of his power in an artifact just for that purpose.

Types of Divination

Divination, even when telling the future, comes in one of two types.

Present-based divination relies on information that can be obtained in the present. This applies to all types of clairvoyance, clairaudience, and other forms of remote sensing, as well as some predictions of the future. A modern analogy would be weather forecasting. They use information available now to make educated guesses. Though if the PCs are placing their lives on the line, hopefully their guru is a little more accurate than the Channel Five news at five.

Future-based divination exclusively tells the future, but unlike extrapolations, the diviner actually yanks information from the future, when the event in question has already happened. This type, while potentially more accurate, raises questions about free will and the nature of time. (If the diviner sees a PC screwing up, is the PC doomed to do so?

Divination that is completely accurate raises a few more problems. With present-based divination (see sidebar), that usually means the GM can't change monster weaknesses on the fly, but with future-based divinations the issue of free will is raised. If it concerns NPCs, there's not much problem because the GM can make happen whatever needs to happen. But if the PCs watch a fortune-telling scene unfold with them in it, is it acceptable to take control of them away when that time comes? Some story-oriented players will accept that, but most will want to defy their "fate."

The easiest way to handle this is to make the information incomplete enough that the party has no idea what ultimately happens. For example, cyberpunk heroes, facing an upcoming battle with a sentient computer virus and its cyborg allies, find a surveillance tape from the complex the battle is going to be held in. But, due to fluxes in space-time caused by the virus's experiments, the tape is of the battle itself. One way to handle the tape is to make it fallible, merely showing one of many possible futures. Another way is to limit the information that can be usefully gleaned. Perhaps the tape only shows the party carefully taking their positions just as the cyborg armies bust through doors number four, six, and seven. And as the battle begins, the surveillance tape shows a curious blip that on further magnification proves to be a small robot heading away from the battle. Then the tape cuts out.

Notice the vagueness present. The PCs "carefully take their positions," without any reference to any particular formation. Some players will ask for specifics, at which point you can admonish them to use their imaginations, or create some other factor, like damage to the tape which makes it too grainy to tell who is who. This vagueness straitjackets no one, leaving them free to choose their destinies. (If pressed, the GM may resort to scientific sounding principles like, "The more specific the information gained, the shorter amount of time it applies to.") And having a misfiring weapon take out the camera once the battle begins can build a nice sense of continuity into the scene. (Having the party need to find some way to get this tape to their earlier counterparts can also be the basis for a miniquest.) But also notice that the tape does provide useful information. Of the doors, the initial assault only comes from four, six, and seven, and there will be a smaller robot the party will need to watch out for. Without such salient information, future-based infallible divination devolves into common-sense assumptions the players could have come up with themselves.

Similarly, prophecies that could mean anything and everything are frustrating to players. Try to avoid these, or at least give them riddles with one or two clear interpretations.

Even if characters perform divinations themselves, they typically incorporate a large amount of bells-and-whistles that can add ambience to any story. Instead of merely casting the stones to make a prediction, "the old seer shuffles around the room, lighting cedar incense. When these preparations are complete, she lowers the lights and settles herself firmly in the middle of the room. From the folds of her robe, she produces a small squirrel-skin and lies it fur down in front of the party. Shaking the oddly-shaped stones in her hand, she blows across them before tossing them violently onto the skin.

Huddling over the stones as if afraid the party might steal them, she squints carefully down, then up, then back down repeatedly, muttering to herself all the while. Eventually she speaks in a voice evoking spiritual possession . . ."

Or is the future mutable, and the diviner only sees the most likely outcome?) The movie *Minority Report* is also about future-based divination, specifically, is it morally right to arrest people for crimes they haven't yet committed?

Modes of Divination

A typical mode of divination is to ask the gods, or other more powerful beings, for information, past, present, or future. This resulting goodies are typically regarded as infallible, often on par with GM-given knowledge. A good way to pique interest is for usually infallible divination suddenly become wildly inaccurate. Is this a sign the gods are displeased with humanity? Are the long-lost enemies of the Keepers of the Time-Space Continuum revealing themselves by altering transmissions?

Another common source of divination, is the casting of stones, bones, tarot cards, and other materials. They work on the principles of synchronicity, that, seemingly by coincidence, the patterns of the universe will be revealed in the arrangement of the items. Most often these practices only divulge the vaguest of information, but can be good for flavor, especially if the setting and procedure are exquisitely invoked. These fortunes are almost exclusively present-based, but if one oracle suddenly becomes exceedingly accurate . . .

Intuition-based divination covers practices such as scrying into crystal

Even if magical divination is a complete fraud, the smoke and mirrors fortune tellers use to convince people are great for color. And a believable fortune might persuade one of the players regardless. Who knows, the prophecy might be plausible enough to be self-fulfilling.

Remember, divination is just another source of information, and most hassles can be avoided by remembering players have access to it. As for telling the future, having a consistent explanation for why divination does/doesn't work goes a long way to avoiding future arguments about world coherency. Plus, the questions raised about the nature of time can provide endless material for campaigns.

Related Links

www.facade.com -- fortune-telling website good for exploring the basics of many divination systems. Lets you choose patterns, explains the results, and offers links to many other sites.

balls. Reading tarot cards can also fall into this category because the cards have so many meanings that the intuition of the reader comes heavily into play. The fallibility and accuracy of these predictions depend on the skill of the reader. Many intuition-based divination schemes also assume that these practices are natural; the reader is simply tapping into a source of information that most people simply choose not to use. Are these so-called prophecies accurate or just plain bull?

And, finally, technological-based divination includes many areas people no longer consider magic, such as wire-taps, the internet, and spy-satellites. Still, finding a machine that shows the future can be awe-inspiring and fun.

Pyramid Review

Mysterious Places (for the World of Darkness)

Published by [White Wolf Games Studio](#)

Written by Kraig Blackwelder, Rick Chillot, Geoff Grabowski, James Kiley, Brett Rebischke-Smith, & Chuck Wendig

Illustrated by Sam Araya, Greg Boychuk, Vince Locke, Chris Martinez, Mark Nelson, Jim Pavelek, Durwin Talon, Jamie Tolagson, Andrew Trabbold, & Cathy Wilkins

138-page B&W hardcover; $24.99

One of the pleasing aspects of the Origins Award-winning *World of Darkness RPG* is the development of the setting even before a storyteller gets to its more outré elements with the addition of *Vampire: the Requiem, Werewolf: the Forsaken,* or *Mage: the Awakening.* The aim here is to have the player characters explore the setting as mere mortals, enabling the game to be played as a traditional horror RPG rather than one in which you play the monster or rather the "superhero by night." Of course, the events of such play can serve as a character's prelude to one of the other aforementioned campaign settings. The supplement *[Ghost Stories](#)* falls exactly into this category, as does the latest release.

Mysterious Places presents nine different locations, ready to work into a campaign or be used to kick off a campaign. They are in turn eldritch, bizarre, or just simply tainted by the horror that lurks just beyond the reality of normal, everyday life. And while they can be used in conjunction with the inhabitants of that beyond place -- vampires, werewolves, and so on, they are nevertheless best used with mere mortals. There is something faintly familiar about the nine places, many feeling as if they have appeared in stories found in books, or on the radio or television. Indeed the feeling with several is as if you have seen them appear in episodes of *The X-Files.* Which is not necessarily a bad thing, though the nine described are flexible enough to be employed outside of that series' format.

Each location is presented in a similar format. It starts with a summary of the place before going on to discuss its history, as well as the myth, the legend, and the reality. NPCs and their motives are discussed before going into the preliminary events that can occur before the stories then can be told there and then suggesting ways in which a story teller might want to bring the story to a close. Included are systems details particular to each place and although particular to the Storytelling System, such details are kept to a minimum thus making any one of the nine easily adapted to other games and mechanics.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The first of the nine is "The Swimming Pool," a dark secret on the edge of any town. Reputedly the pool is bottomless, or home to gigantic catfish, or the site of a teenage suicide pact, or of a secret kept by the pool's owner. In reality, the pool is a water filled quarry that grants a wish to those who make a sacrifice of fresh blood. Much like the tale of The Monkey's Paw, a wish in the World of Darkness is double edged. Again this is a secret kept by those in the know. "The Swimming Pool" can be played with the characters as outsiders or as locals, even children. Whereas the secret in this place is well defined, that of "The University" is less so but more pervasive; its secret is literally able to influence those on the campus, whether on the faculty, other staff, or students. How much is known about this "influence" and by whom is another matter. It is also very much up to the Storyteller to define this influence and how it can be combated.

There is something of the ghoulish and the American Gothic in "Swamp Indian Hollow." This has the ability to animate the dead, not as whole corpses but as puppets made from the flesh and bones of the recently departed. Clinton Weiss runs a nearby crematorium and thus has access to a ready supply of the dead. Always a lonely man, Weiss uses the constructed puppets to create a fantasy world that he and his mother can inhabit. Clothed in the proper accoutrements, the puppets take on suitable roles such as police patrolmen and mother's nieces. Clinton has also crafted puppets that can be worn and also impart roles such as the Mayor. This is a quiet affair and possibly difficult to use, but faintly reminiscent of *A Nightmare Before Christmas.*

"The Village Secret" plays on notions of rural isolation and another community with something to hide. This is nothing less than the source of eternal life, something that the villagers will go to extreme measures to protect. Equally adapted to other places, including an inner city ghetto this falls back heavily on rural stereotypes. More interesting and potentially more personal is "The Statue Of Weeping Alice" which portrays the sudden turnaround in fortunes of a declining town after a neglected statue of a young girl suddenly sheds tears. Much like "the swimming pool" this comes at a cost, again in terms of sacrifice. The question is how far will the townspeople and possibly the characters go to retain this new found prosperity?

"Hillcrest Centre for Elder Living" is reputed to be a retirement home for the mafia, and there is some truth to that as one resident is an ex-hit man. Yet there are other secrets more difficult to explore than the other locations. This entry in *Mysterious Places* draws the strongest comparison with an episode of *The X-Files.* Events take on a personal touch in "The Whispering Wood," wherein the recently morally weakened characters are drawn into the clutches of the woods by voices. Here they encounter the remnants of a carnival, long lost within the woods. Joining this circus is enforced when the characters transform into carnie freaks, each character's appearance determined by personal vices. Near impossible to escape the surrounding thicket of thorns, the key lies in dealing with the residents of the woods and coming to terms with these vices. Of all the locations in this book, this makes the best use of the game's virtue and vice rules.

"The Junkyard" is much like "The University," in that the cause of its strangeness is left for the storyteller to decide upon. At its core is the idea that the junkyard is a repository for the cars we so personify and asks what becomes of this entombed personality once discarded as unwanted? Of course, the owners of the junkyard are less than savory characters, and the dogs and rats worse, but suggested options include the junkyard reanimating the dead, the owner carrying out grisly acts that he always forgets, and coming upon the yard via a student film, similar to *The Blair Witch Project.* The last of the nine places is "The Empty Room," an architectural anomaly that draws in its victims for exponentially longer and longer periods of time. Can these victims survive their periods of incarceration and what truth is there in the rumors that somebody survived "The Empty Room"?

[END SPOILER ALERT]

What *Mysterious Places* serves up is several slices of Americana along with a side order of the American Gothic. This is all well crafted, well written, and -- barring the occasional typographic oddity -- well presented. The many situations described herein evoke more a sense of creepiness that the Storyteller can ratchet up into outright horror, depending upon his whim and the dictates of the story. Some like "Swamp Indian Hollow" and "The Statue of Weeping Alice" are also quite touching in their own small way. The horror is for the Storyteller to create and impart, but with *Mysterious Places,* he certainly has rich material to work with. And even better, *Mysterious Places* is good not just for the *World of Darkness* -- it can be used with virtually any horror RPG.

--Matthew Pook

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

More Powers for Powers

for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Reverend P. Kitty

While **Characters** introduced the psionic power framework to **GURPS** *Fourth Edition,* **Powers** took it to the next level and created powers for *anything.* From ancient Shaolin healing techniques to demonically powered deception of the senses, any concept can be turned into a robust, flexible power. The examples below follow the rules and guidelines from Chapter One of **Powers** and represent some common themes found in a wide variety of genres.

Density

"The closer we come to an atmosphere with only one sun -- a yellow sun -- the more our molecular density gives us unlimited powers."
-- General Zod, *Superman II*

Sources: Super
Focus: Density

This is the power to alter the density of oneself, other people, or any inanimate objects. Its users can increase their density to become incredibly tough and strong or decrease it to walk through walls. Opponents targeted by Density power generally experience the drawbacks instead; increased density can slow, stop, or even crush a target, while density can be *partially* decreased to make them easier to hurt. The quasi-scientific nature of this ability makes it poorly suited for a supernatural power; in practice, it is rarely found outside of four-color comics (Super).

Density Talent: 5 points/level

Density Abilities

Binding, with Unbreakable (and usually with Constricting); Catfall, with Feather Fall; Damage Resistance, with Tough Skin*; Improved G-Tolerance*; Injury Tolerance (any of Damage Reduction*, Diffuse, or Homogenous*); Insubstantiality; Lifting ST*; Permeation, but *not* with Tunnel; Pressure Support*; Protected Power; Radiation Tolerance*; Resistant to Knockback*; Striking ST*; Vacuum Support*; Walk on Air; and Walk on Liquid.

* These advantages can take a Nuisance Effect if the user becomes incredibly heavy when using them. Twice normal weight (minimum 500 pounds) is worth -5%. Ten times normal weight (minimum 2,000 pounds) is worth -10%. Knockback is a Common threat; resistance adds to ST instead of HT.

Density wielders can buy Afflictions to change the density of other people or objects. Afflictions which reduce density should have Advantage (Insubstantiality), to dematerialize the subject completely, or any of Attribute Penalty (ST), Negated Advantage (Damage Resistance), and Disadvantage (Skinny and Vulnerability to Physical Attacks), to partially lower the target's density, making them weaker and more fragile.

Afflictions to increase density should have Advantage (any marked with a * from the list above) and/or Disadvantage (Reduced Basic Speed, Cannot Swim, and either Very Fat or Increased Life Support (Massive), depending on whether you want the target to weigh twice as much or ten times as much). Very Fat should be treated as a non-metabolic variant which includes no skill bonuses or penalties. Selectivity will let you give your friends the advantages of increased density while saddling your opponents with the drawbacks; this isn't particularly realistic, but neither is the genre in which this power is normally found!

Power Modifier: Density. The advantage belongs to the Density power. This modifier is almost always Super (-10%).

Dream

"Now I rule the dreamworld. I will hide in dreams. I will be a wise and tolerant monarch, dispensing justice fairly, and only setting nightmares to rip out the minds of the evil and wicked. Or just anybody I don't like."
-- John Dee, *Sandman: Sound and Fury*

Sources: Divine, Magic, Psionic, or Spirit
Focus: Dreams and sleep

Dream power gives its users control over states of consciousness and the dreams that emerge from the deepest levels of sleep. They can interact with dreaming subjects, either communicating through their dreams or taking control of them directly. This power usually represents a specialized path of sorcery (Magic), being in service to the Dream Lords or their kind (Divine or Spirit), or a mental discipline somewhere between Astral Projection and Telepathy (Psionic).

In many settings, the dreams of every sleeper all float through the same ethereal sea. This is the dream world, with countless dream bubbles bobbing and drifting but (almost) never colliding. In such a game, this power also allows its users to visit this dream world via the Jumper advantage. If the campaign does not feature such a world, GMs may allow a Dream adept to project directly into a single person's dream instead, or disallow the advantage entirely.

Dream Talent: 5 points/level

Dream Abilities

Detect (Sleepers); Doesn't Sleep; Fatigue Attack, with Malediction and Hazard, Missed Sleep; Healing, with Affliction Only and Accessibility, Only Dream Afflictions (-20%); Illusion, with Mental*; Jumper (World), with Projection (+0%) and Limited, Dream World (-20%); Less Sleep; Mind Probe*; Mind Reading*; Mind Shield, with Limited, Dream; Oracle, as interpreting dreams; Protected Power; Telecommunications (Telesend)*; Terror*; and Visualization.

* These advantages must have Accessibility, Only on sleeping subjects (-20%) or Accessibility, Only on sleeping or daydreaming subjects (-10%). The latter includes dazed and hallucinating subjects as well.

Afflictions are allowed with Malediction and one or more of Coma, Daze, Hallucinating, Sleep, Unconsciousness, Advantage (any of Deep Sleeper, Doesn't Sleep, or Less Sleep), Disadvantage (any of Extra Sleep, Insomniac, Light Sleeper, Nightmares, Sleepy, or Slow Riser), or any Negated Advantage or Negated Disadvantage for the above. These are also the only Afflictions that Dream's Healing can neutralize.

With GM permission, Control (Dreams) may be included as part of this power, for 30 points/level. (See *Godlike Control* on p. 92 of **Powers**.) By default, it only applies to the dream which currently involves the user, or that of the person he's touching. With an IQ roll, the level of Control can be used as a bonus or penalty to any roll made by a participant in the dream. This can include Psychology rolls to analyze the dreamer, Fright Checks made by the dreamer, the wielder's Illusion rolls to change the dream, and so on. Control can lengthen or shorten the duration of a dream from the dreamer's perspective; use the guidelines for Control (Time). Depending on the setting, more esoteric uses may be available; for example, if a dream world exists, Control may allow you to merge the dreams of a number of people equal to its level.

Power Modifier: Dream. The advantage belongs to the Dream power. This modifier is typically Divine (-10%), Magic (-10%), Psionic (-10%), or Spirit (-25%).

Sensory Awareness

Sources: Biological, Chi, Divine, Spirit, or Super
Focus: Enhanced senses

"You're a detective with hyperactive senses! You're a monster, man, a human crime lab with organic surveillance equipment. What more could you want?" "Control."
-- Blair Sandburg and Jim Ellison, *The Sentinel*

Wielders of this power can use their five senses to their utmost acuity. Unusual senses are apppropriate as well, as long as they can be rationalized as being based on one or more of the wielder's existing senses. Senses that emit some form of energy to work (e.g., Scanning Sense) or that involve wholly supernatural methods of perception (e.g., Clairsentience) are never allowed; take ESP power for that. Sensory Awareness power may be the result of inborn mutation (Biological or Super) or intense training of the senses (Chi), but just as often represents a pact with an all-seeing god (Divine) or equivalent spirits (Spirit).

Sensory Awareness Talent: 5 points/level

Sensory Awareness Abilities

Dark Vision, with Hypersensory; Discriminatory Hearing; Discriminatory Smell; Discriminatory Taste; Enhanced Tracking; Hyperspectral Vision; Infravision; Microscopic Vision; Night Vision; Parabolic Hearing; Peripheral Vision; Protected Power; Protected Sense; Psychometry, with Hypersensory; Sensitive Touch; Subsonic Hearing; Telescopic Vision; Ultrahearing; Ultravision; and Vibration Sense, but *not* with Sense of Perception.

In a game that plays fast and loose with the laws of physics, some GMs may permit Scanning Sense (Para-Radar) with the No Intercept enhancement to be considered a passive, "hypersensory" extension of the normal senses and thus eligible for this power. No other Scanning Sense is ever appropriate, however. Note that while See Invisible is not part of this power, Dark Vision (with Hypersensory) and Vibration Sense will both allow the user to find and fight invisible foes.

Sensory Awareness users will benefit greatly from Acute Senses and extra levels of Perception, though neither qualify for the Power Modifier. See *Inappropriate Abilities* (**Powers,** p. 10) for an explanation.

Power Modifier: Sensory Awareness. The advantage belongs to the Sensory Awareness power. This modifier is generally Biological (-10%), Chi (-10%), Divine (-10%), Spirit (-25%), or Super (-10%).

Speed

"You'd leave me standing, son."
"I can leave photons standing, Jay."
-- Flash (Jay Garrett) and Flash (Wally West), *JLA: Crisis Times Five*

Sources: Biological, Chi, or Super
Focus: Personal acceleration

This power allows the user to accelerate the speed at which his body acts, down to the molecular level. The majority of its abilities involve multiple actions, high-speed running, and rapid recovery. Speed power is commonly found in the comics (Super), where it includes the ability to "match the atomic frequencies" of matter (Insubstantiality) or of other dimensions or times (Jumper). However, it is equally appropriate for the swift fists of wuxia fighters (Chi) or naturally fast prodigies (Biological).

Speed Talent: 5 points/level

Speed Abilities

Altered Time Rate; Chameleon, with Dynamic and Accessibility, Only While Running (-30%) but *not* with Controllable; Enhanced Dodge; Enhanced Move (Ground); Enhanced Time Sense; Extra Attack; Insubstantiality*; Invisibility, with Switchable and Accessibility, Only While Running (-30%); Jumper (Time or World)*; Protected Power; Recovery; Regeneration; Striking ST; Super Jump; Temperature Tolerance, for cold; and Walk on Liquid, with Accessibility, Only While Running (-30%).

* These advantages may not be appropriate in certain genres (GM's decision).

In a cinematic game, the GM may allow Speed users to take the Cosmic (+50%) enhancement on their Enhanced Move, negating the need for any acceleration time. In such a game, Warp may also be added as part of this power, with a special limitation, "Must Traverse Distance: You actually travel to the destination under your own power; you just do it instantly. You cannot warp to anywhere you could not get to normally, given time. -30%." This allows the speedster to travel across the country in the blink of an eye without being able to teleport out of a jail cell.

Increased DX, Basic Speed, and Basic Move are all *de rigeur* for anyone with Speed power, but they are not part of the power itself.

Power Modifier: Speed. The advantage belongs to the Speed power. This modifier is usually Biological (-10%), Chi (-10%), or Super (-10%).

Everything Is Coming Up Roses

a Campaign Setting for *In Nomine*

by Eric Funk

Located in a central location in the campaign city, somewhere between "downtown" and the largest hospital, there is a flower shop that has been in the news lately for its kindly deeds. The owners of "By Any Other Name" donate flowers to causes and worthy events, pay their taxes, and go about their lives. Unbeknownst to its owners, Servitors of Novalis have worked around the clock for months to help this business thrive. Only the combined efforts of a small team of angels of Flowers were able to protect it from sabotage and buyouts. The angels have also arranged for various Trade-connected businesses to offer their services. The shop now has cutting-edge over-the-counter security, surveillance, refrigeration, and a web page where one can order flowers to be delivered to anywhere in the city. Metal shutters cover the large front windowpanes at night.

It all began after Mark and Cindy Oswald retired, and started a small knick-knack shop. The business was barely profitable, selling a paltry number of party balloons and shirts. This all changed one day while Cindy was arranging some flowers she received for her birthday. A man was watching her at the store, seeming amazed. "Lady, you have real talent! Here is a number for a greenhouse I know." He bought a gag four-armed t-shirt and a tie-dye kit. The man scribbled a local phone number on a piece of paper, and in a twirl of his dreadlocks, he was gone, never to be seen again. The angel of Flowers who took the call was surprised to find a human phoning the line, but both parties seemed amenable, and soon the greenhouse had a new client. Sensing promise, the angel of Flowers called in some favors and soon a Mercurian of Trade and a Seraph of Trade were called in to help. These celestials are doing their best to nurture the growth of "By Any Other Name" from a careful distance, as direct celestial interference can inhibit the generation of a Tether. Few spend much time around the building itself.

Floor Plan

The shop itself is laid out in a square. Upon entering, the left and right walls are Floor plans floor-to-ceiling refrigerators filled with blooming flowers. The far wall has the desk and balloon sales. Behind this desk is the t-shirt press and publishing computer. They carry a large variety of balloons, stuffed animals, vases, and greeting cards. They also sell a small variety of bells and statuettes. The quality varies from major brand name merchandise to no-name brand, easily affordable goods. The emphasis is on giving gifts from the heart, not flashy toys.

Celestial Affairs

The elevation of this store in the minds of the local populace has begun to shift belief toward amiability and compassion. War-like and infernal Tethers in the area have noticed their power diminishing lately. Word is out on the infernal side that something "good" is on the rise, and is causing Infernal Tethers to shrink. The up-and-coming pretty thing is this establishment, so many Infernals are planning to give them "the business" even though they don't let themselves believe that they could actually *lose* one of their links to the celestial realm.

- **In the unlikely event that a Tether were to form here, the groups most likely to claim it are:** Flowers, Trade, Creation.
- **Those for the Tether:** Dreams, Stone.
- **Those against the Tether:** the Sword, War.

- **Infernal stances are as follows:**
  - *Active:* Factions, Death, Dark Humor, the Game.
  - *Passive:* Fire, the War, Technology, the Media, Nightmares.

The Superiors most interested will also react with the strongest reward/punishment.

Opposing Forces

Angelic

While not directly opposing Novalis, the war-like Servitors of War and the Sword are responding to their diminishing Tethers with military parades and historical recreations. Memorial events are quietly discouraged by those who see the up-and-coming florist shop as a possible cause of the diminishing Tethers. There is a another movement that encourages the association of flowers with heroes and dreams.

Mundane

Research into local current affairs will reveal two rival corporations having difficulties in one way or another:

The most obvious corporeal threat is the multinational corporation "Romanticorp." Its local director has taken the refusal of "By Any Other Name" to be bought out personally, and is preparing to move the huge levers the company has ready. His "threats" will be fresh in the minds of the Oswalds, but so far, there is no evidence linking the recent events to his office. In fact, he has yet to do more than order a deep examination of their business and personal past. If asked, he will be confident and honestly believe that their selling is in the best interest of everyone.

Busy Bee Flower Co. specializes in flower delivery and cheap cards. Its owners have invested their life savings into the business. Despite this, it is quickly approaching bankruptcy. It would not take much to push them over the edge (such as a Balseraph or Shedite) . . .

Infernal Affairs

Eager servants of Death and/or Dark Humor plot to taint the "send home" fertilizer with herbicide so the flowers are dead by the next day (the fertilizer packets that one puts in one's vase of water to extend the life of the bloom). Unbeknownst to them, Servitors of Technology plan to infect the flowers so they all grow thorns (or attract flies) after an hour in the fertilizer. The Vapulans' "Plan B" is to open an adjacent shop with secretly noxious fumes, and sells cheap gadgets (phone covers, music, accessories).

Other generic infernal plots might be mistaken for terrorist attacks or gang violence. In general, however, no Prince currently believes this shop to be a threat to their operations or Word -- any major movement would have tipped off the angels. Those Princes that do know of its operation have merely tagged it for observation in case it *does* become a real threat.

Metaplot: The Call for Help

The heat is being turned up. Bricks have been thrown through windows from moving cars, and fires started in garbage bins . . . Since the angels of Flowers have thus far been unable to catch the culprits in the act, they decided they need help. The Seraph Arthur (see below) deduces it must be him who calls for help as the angels of Flowers will be uneasy about hiring Malakim (whom he considers to be the best trackers). He cannot directly help, as he is preparing for a tax audit (instigated by an anonymous tip from the opposition). He cannot offer much of a reward. If there are Servitors of War or The Sword who need persuading to join, he might be able to get them on the list to beta-test some Jeanite weapons down the road.

The PCs will be assigned to one or more of the following areas:

a. As the characters go about their Role, they are to hand out coupons and business cards. If they encounter resistance, they are to pass information to b).
b. They are to investigate resistance and competing ads. If they find something suspicious, they are to report it to c).
c. Investigate companies that seem to have unusual antagonism toward "By Any Other Name." If infernal ties are found, report it to d)
d. Combat team. If things get really bad, call in the celestial SWAT team.

Word gets out (or the PCs discover) that agents of Baal (or Belial) are planning to strike at the shop on the same night. A human will drive a steamroller into the shop after midnight. Another human will be planting an explosive device later that morning if the first plan fails. The level of celestial backup will vary according to the visibility (and ability) of the PCs.

Rumors and Ruminations

It is said that local angels of Flowers have developed a technique to temporarily turn a flower into a Reliquary/1 until dawn. There is a special, rotating code word that one can say when ordering to have one included. A payment of 3 Essence is also required, either up front (preferred), or later. If the rumor gets out, demons may start mugging people carrying single flowers. Quick-thinking angels will capitalize on this, and eventually the balance will be restored.

Owners: Mark and Cindy Oswald

They are five-Force Humans in their late 50s. Regular churchgoers, they are often volunteers at charity functions. While not aware of the War or the nature of the angels working in the area, they suspect that their new employees are not working up to their potential. It is unknown at this time what their Force potential is or what their destiny and fate are (all this may change soon).

Arthur "Benité" ("Please, just Arthur."), Certified Accountant
Seraph Vassal of Trade, in service to Flowers (Corporeal: 2, Ethereal: 4, Celestial: 4)

He will rarely be encountered, except if one is investigating the fiscal operation of the company. Arthur is shy but has studied basic hand-to-hand combat. This Seraph is the only contact this operation has with the Jeanites, from former missions. His services are out-sourced from a nearby mini-mall.

Sally O'Gluke, Promotional Consultant
Mercurian of Trade, in service to Flowers (Corporeal: 3, Ethereal: 3, Celestial: 3)

She will be encountered behind the scenes at public events where the company is delivering or donating large arrangements. Her exceptional skills are her writing, choreography, and marketing. She will usually be busy darting from location to location, and thus rarely encountered for long or able to directly help or interfere. Some celestials believe her to be an Ofanite! She operates from one of Trade's consulting firms in the city.

"Charlie" Sing Wu, "Delivery Boy"
Malakite of Flowers (Corporeal: 4, Ethereal: 2, Celestial: 3)

Charlie's latest vessel appears to be a 70-year-old retired martial arts instructor. He claims to have killed a demon using only a rose on more than one occasion. (He will not elaborate on whether that is the same demon or multiple demons.) If Charlie knows he has a group of young celestials, the Malakite will describe the battle in as much detail as the crowd can take in the guise of a rambling war story. He enjoys delivering to hospitals and using his Cherub of Novalis attunement to take on the wounds of honorable people. Thus his own health (e.g. Body hits/Hit Points) is often

low, aiding his Role. If available, he should be considered skilled in a mundane style as well as [Celestial Kung Fu](#).

Joshua "Crazy Joey" Vallient, "Delivery Boy"
Ofanite of Flowers (Corporeal: 4, Ethereal: 3, Celestial: 2)

"Crazy Joey" is the most expedient delivery driver. Crazy Joey can do as he please, but he knows that if he gets bad publicity, he will get fewer orders. More importantly, if the car is damaged, it won't drive as quickly. When his car does break down, he has been known to use his Ofanite of Novalis attunement to get there.

k'Zak, Observer, Scenery
Kyriotate of Flowers (Corporeal: 3, Ethereal: 3, Celestial: 3)

For special missions, one could call upon k'Zak, a recently fledged Kyriotate of Flowers to go along with a delivery, but this is could be tricky as she is still naïve about many aspects of the corporeal plane. When not on missions, she watches the store from across the street, inside various potted plants hanging over ten feet in the air from street lamps.

Variants

Flower Power

In the 1960s, the rise of "Flower Power," the young citizens will flock in and buy flowers to distribute. This cross-community culture will be met with mixed feelings from the followers of Stone and Factions . . . In the late 90s, it may be nostalgia, but perhaps it can be in the rise in the campaign area.

Other Systems

While the mystical Word-power does not transfer well (except perhaps in aspected mana or aspected sanctity), the intrigue of foreign spy groups infiltrating a neutral city is timeless. The idea of two factions operating covertly in a medieval city or futuristic space station can apply just as easily. Each faction has businesses and business goals they approve of, with specialist departments that focus on improving the social circles they know. (e.g. one branch directs Technology Research and Development, another the Arts . . .) Case in point: The "angels" are code for a group of operatives working in the port city of Flagstaff. One of the cover operations (unknown even to its founders) is thriving almost unexpectedly, and is starting to make waves.

Resources

Pyramid

- ["About Town"](#) by Vincent Paul Cooper

Media

- *Little Shop of Horrors.*

Pyramid Review

Eric Flint's 1632 Resource Guide & Role Playing Game

Published by Battlefield Press Inc.

Written by Jonathon M. Thompson

Cover by Brent Chumley

Illustrated by Richard A. Spake

Cartography by Cheryl Daetwyler & Anna Dobritt

212-page B&W softcover; $34.95

Eric Flint's 1632 and its sequels (co-authored with David Weber) have proved to be popular tales of an alternate history that in their way are a variant of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court.* They open in the year 2000 in the West Virginia town of Grantville, which suffers an inexplicable calamity that came to be known as the "Ring of Fire." An exact spherical area centering on the town is transposed in time and space with a location in the Northern Germany of 1630. The 3,000 inhabitants of the town find themselves in the midst of the Thirty Years War, the conflict that ravaged a Europe split by religious differences. On the one side is the Catholic Holy Roman Empire while the leading proponent of Protestantism is Gustav II Adolph, King of Sweden.

Fortunately the townsfolk of Grantville have some advantages in terms of technology and knowledge, equipment, and of course, an enlightened, modern attitude. Thus, led by members of the local chapter UMWA, the United Mine Workers of America, is enough of a basis for Grantville to not only survive and protect itself, but also go on to adapt itself to its newfound circumstances, forging alliances and establishing the new United States of America. All of this is detailed in the first book and its sequels, *1633* and *1634,* while **Eric Flint's 1632: Resource Guide and Roleplaying Game** sets out to give you everything needed to play in this history altered by the arrival of the West Virginians.

The sourcebook, written using the **Action! Core System** employed elsewhere in the Firefly Games' **Monster Island** and Gold Rush Games' **War of the Worlds RPG,** is designed to be a complete game including rules, a brief history of the Thirty Years War, maps of locations from the novels, a new short story, descriptions and statistics of characters from the books, and all intended to be totally canonical for the 163X universe. And while all that might be true, the end result is hardly going to keep the gaming devotee of the 163X-verse happy. The unfortunate truth is that **Eric Flint's 1632 Resource Guide and Roleplaying Game** is the victim of a number of failings.

Fortunately one of the failings is not the book's opening piece of fiction. John Zeck's short story "Family" is set during the latter events of *1632,* and is decent enough, but nevertheless enjoyable. Nor can use of the **Action! System Core Rules** be considered a failing. Generic by design, they allow the creation of any ordinary character for the 163X-verse, either a down-timer of 1632 or an up-timer of 2000. The 163X-verse is meant to be realistic, and characters designed for the game are intended to reflect this. That said, the generic nature of the mechanics means that a referee could adapt the stats for any of the characters from the novels to the game and system of his choice.

This is all well and good because the rules take up over three quarters of this book's length, and out of that roughly just the one page is given over to creating a character for the 163X-verse. This amounts to a pair of rules. The first is the number of character and skill points to be spent in character generation. The second is the guide to character creation

for 163X found way, *way* back in the rear of the book. This discusses the types of characters possible, and those unsuitable for the setting. That is, no Navy SEALs, CIA agents, or NASA scientists. It gives a link to an online resource listing every up-timer in 1632, and suggests an optional "Wild Card" rule. Issued one per player a Wild Card can be expended to either explain a character's unusual background compared to the average citizen of Grantville or why he might own a particular piece of equipment. An example of the former would be the cheerleader Julie Sims, noted biathlon athlete and superb shot, while Frank Jackson's hoarding of M-60 machine gun is an example of the latter.

But the problems with ***Eric Flint's 1632 Resource Guide and Roleplaying Game*** start with the presentation. The layout is at best pedestrian and at worst slipshod, with misaligned boxes of text, and others squeezed in to at best utilitarian effect. The artwork suffers from its own problems. Some of it is reasonable, but other pieces are anachronistic, and the constant repetition of artwork is both irksome and a waste of space, although none of this is the fault of the artist. Likewise the illustrations depicting various buildings suffer similarly, being both unlabelled and used over and over. The result is that the artwork does not serve the material, but merely serves to bulk the book out.

And then there are the maps. Those of the Holy Roman Empire are workmanlike and useful enough, but others are dreadfully useless. The only interior map borders on being indistinct, while the one of Grantville actually depicts the area transposed by the Ring of Fire in not so much a bird's eye view but rather the view as seen from the cockpit of an inverted Lockheed SR-71. Then this absurdity is compounded by the decision to quarter the map and place one quarter per page. It is just so indescribably useless . . .

And then there is the writing. The quality of the writing for the ***Action! System Rules*** is reasonable, but then it has been edited and used elsewhere. Little else has. In both describing the town of Grantville and several of the nearest new neighboring settlements in Germany and explaining Europe of the 1630s, the writing is at least informative. Otherwise the writing style is at best described as stilted and in need of a good polish.

As to the statistics and backgrounds of characters of the novels, these are sequestered away in an appendix again at the back of the book. The statistics are reasonable enough, but many characters receive less space than that given to the write up and description of an ordinary wolf listed earlier in the book. Too often this brevity does not do any justice to the characters of the novels.

Finally, there is the scenario, "The Last Valley," based upon the 1971 film of the same name. The players take the roles of up-timers sent out as a small party from Grantville to locate fresh sources of food and trading partners. There are encounters with local fauna, the chance to hunt it, and finally an opportunity to forge links with an isolated hamlet threatened by marauding mercenaries. It is not a bad scenario, and uniformly the nearest that the book gets to advice on running a 163X-verse campaign.

Eric Flint's 1632 Resource Guide and Roleplaying Game also suffers by its omissions: Index, bibliography of either of the novels or any other useful source material, glossary of the novels, chronology of the novels, gazetteer of the novels, advice for the GM to help him run a 163X-verse game or campaign . . . none of these elements are present. And there is also the dichotomy at the heart of the book, between rules and source material. The two are separate despite the book's organization that mixes the two over the course of its length. No serious attempt is made to write and adapt the rules to the 163X-verse.

The combination of all these factors is at least a disappointment, and an expensive one at that. Perhaps the gaming shelves have been spoiled by similar sourcebooks from Steve Jackson Games and Green Ronin Publishing, but this book does not succeed on so very many of its claims. Ultimately the result is that ***Eric Flint's 1632 Resource Guide and Roleplaying Game*** is a disservice to both the 163X novels and their authors.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

The Hollywood Card Game

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Designed by Bruno Faidutto, Michael Schacht, & Christian T. Petersen

Edited by Greg Benage

Art & graphics by Brian Schomburg, Szucs Gregory, & Daniele Bigliardo

64 cards, 16 reel counters, rule booklet; three to four players, full-color, boxed; $6.95

Hollywood has done some amazing things on a shoestring budget. When they do it, it's miraculous; when Fantasy Flight Games does one of their itty-bitty games at dirt-cheap prices, it's just business as usual. The twain have met at *The Hollywood! Card Game*, the gamers' chance to be a Tinseltown mogul.

The object of the game is to score the most points for your projects by the end of the game.

Each round, a set of 14 cards -- three Stars and 11 Films -- are laid out in a grid on the board. There are four columns, two containing four cards and two that have three cards. Players have a set of film reel counters with which they stake claims to various movie components, and a couple of cards that let them break a few rules during play.

You can only put your film reels on the cards along the bottom row. The next person to put their token on that card then "bumps" your counter one card up that same column. This means if you want the topmost card in a column, you have to be the first to play your piece there. Depending on what cards are aligned beneath it, you may or may not be able to count on other players to do the "bumping" for you. If they don't, you may have to commit most or all of your own counters to get that card, so it better be worth it.

Everyone has the same two Studio cards: the Double Reel and Clap Board cards. Playing the Double Reel lets you place two canisters in a single turn, while playing the Clap Board lets you pass your turn, forcing the next person to play his reel tokens (not having to place your tokens first can be a valuable strategy). Studio cards aren't returned after use; they're good once each per game, not per round (timing really is everything in Hollywood). When all reels are placed, the round is over and everyone collects the cards from under their canister counters. Two cards go unclaimed each round, and the rest must be laid out in front of their claimants one at a time. This may force you to finish a movie before you're ready, so the order in which you get your cards back is important. For the next round, a new grid is laid out and the person who goes first rotates one player to the left.

The movies that score best at the end of the game are the ones that have at least one Film card paired with a Star. Film cards are from one of three genres: romantic comedy, action, and science fiction. You can only have one of each type in the pipeline at one time, so if you get multiples in a single style, they're all part of one big production. Stars are directors and actors that work on your movie, and they're rated from one to three stars. To find the value of a finished movie, multiply the "star" power by the number of cards in that stack (and by any awards the film won -- one card from each genre offers this bonus). If you've put a lot of work into a large film but don't finish it, it may still score a few points at the end of the game. Blockbusters are standalone cards that give you a set number of points, and if you're playing the advanced rules you'll multiply movies again by any unclaimed cards of that genre.

For such a small game, the components are nice. Oh, sure, the tokens are hardy little fellows, and even the rulebook is

a stiff, colorful little affair, but the cards? Each one looks like a painted thumbnail of something that ought to be framed and selling at the art auction in a convention. If they go to these lengths for just a card game . . .

Also like Hollywood, there are "wrinkles." The components fit as long as the pieces haven't been punched out, but once you've got the reel tokens popped out you'll need a slim baby Ziploc baggie (or you'll have to forgo the game's tuckbox altogether and come up with your own method of storage). In game play the trouble comes from all the slight permutations the mechanics offer. There's a lot to keep track of, and it all affects your final score. Developing a strategy that takes all of these factors into account takes a good memory, and a decent computer spreadsheet wouldn't hurt either.

Finding out if you're willing to learn all the tricks and scorings takes you a long way into the game, though, so you'll have plenty of time to formulate an overall opinion. If you do stick with it, this is a fast game with surprisingly deep waters to plumb. As small as it is, it's not a trivial workout for your gaming muscles. (It's a wonder the whole gaming industry doesn't rise up against Fantasy Flight for its ability to come up with simple wonders of this nature.) ***The Hollywood Card Game*** is an impressive production with a small time investment for a trifling cost, and shows once again that this company can work under any conditions and still come out with a winner. To paraphrase the industry it so ably depicts, there are no small games, just small companies.

--Andy Vetromile

We'll Always Have . . . Where Are We, Again?

[Last week](#) we were talking about the suffering I endured by watching the movie *Soultaker* -- a movie where even MST3Kification could not disguise the fact that 90% of the "action" consists of people running through hallways. My advice was simple: Don't watch *Soultaker* . . . ever. Oh, and I also spouted off some gaming nonsense about making sure to shake up adventures by mixing up the scenery.

Anyway, last week focussed on trying to create a number of locations, even within a seemingly limited setting. The obvious examples are various ship-based campaigns; a show such as *Star Trek: The Next Generation* had a number of settings, including the bridge, conference room, captain's ready room, observation lounge, the engineering room, various crewmember quarters, a holodeck (an infinite setting itself), a haircuttery, and a bar. (And, of course, miles of exciting hallway.)

Now, even a seemingly limited setting can usually have some alternate places that can serve to shake up a session. Our worked example from 168 hours ago was a courtroom drama, akin to *Law & Order, Perry Mason,* or *Matlock* (one of my favorites). Now, last week we dealt with the locations that were in the same building as our hypothetical courtroom. But even remaining true to the idea of a courtroom drama, we can add a lot of locations to our campaign:

- Police station (discussing case with officers)
    - CSI lab (trying to get specific evidence for or against a client)
- DA's office
- The cite of a press conference (the steps of the courthouse, city hall, or the like)
- Client's home/office/other preferred meeting area
- Psychologist's office (for profiles, discussion of case)
- Bar (booze is the lubricant of law)
- Law office (if series focuses on defense council or civil law)
- Homes of any of the main characters

As you can see, it's easy to expand the idea of setting even in a seemingly limited setting.

Speaking of the last item on the list above, one technique I used to good effect in some of my old campaigns -- especially those set within modern eras or focused on one city -- is asking the players to come up with what their abodes are like. Having this information on hand allows for the GM to craft some interesting scenes, as well as allowing a natural flow should those set pieces come into play. ("We need a place to hide this witness." "What about my place?") A simple questionnaire can work wonders here:

- **Where does the character live?** (Part of town, type of neighborhood, etc.)
- **What is the dwelling like?** (cramped apartment, palatial house, Antarctic refuge, etc.)
- **What is the character's living arrangement?** (significant other, roommates, pets, etc.)
- **What are some special features of the apartment?**

And so on. I never forced players to provide the information, but there was the implicit understanding that, should a PC's home come into play during the game, I'd make up anything he didn't specify. ("Clearly evil-doers broke into your apartment." "How do I know that?" "Your exhaustive Wang Chung CD collection was stolen." "Waitaminute . . . I have a Wang Chung collection?" "Not anymore.")

As an aside, I generally didn't use this information to work over NPCs, per se; for example, if the character chooses to list that he's living with someone, but he hasn't taken that person as a dependant or other readymade-victim-type disadvantage, then I tend to make sure that extra doesn't exist merely to get captured or threatened. (On the other hand, they can make excellent plot starters unto themselves: "<BRRRRRRRING!> Hi, hon. Were you expecting ninjas? . . . Okay, good; I just knocked one out with a vase. He has some kind of note you might want to take a look at. Oh, and we need another extension cord.")

Now, when should the scenery change? Put simply, whenever the danger of having one background around too long threatens to be boring -- including, if need be, preemptively thwarting such boredom. This can be as simple as having "established" sets that happen periodically. For example, *Ally McBeal* had a near-daily evening round of boozing at their favorite watering hole. (As an aside, this is the second time in two weeks I've mentioned *Ally McBeal.* Clearly the *Futurama* episode I saw a couple of weeks ago with *[Single Female Lawyer](#)* has left an indelible mark on my soul.) Or it can be whenever the current setting has been around too long. There's actually a simple test for when you might want to consider changing the scenery: When folks forget where the scene is taking place, it's time to change the place. (And if you *do* remember the scenery, but only to remark about how boring it is -- such as an endless chase sequence in hallways -- it's almost certainly time to shake things up.) In the real world, setting is always on the forefront of people's minds; a date between two people in a fancy French restaurant will be very different from the same date at a sporting event. This isn't to say elongated usage of a location is necessarily a bad thing. The corollary of the rule mentioned above also applies: So long as people remember where they are (in a non-negative way), then it's probably fine to continue using that set piece even if the scene itself is running a bit long.

Many campaigns seem to have limited set-piece potential, yet all but the most constrained settings can usually have some change of pace. The trick is knowing where the bars are, and knowing when to nip out for a drink.

--Steven Marsh

Icosahedron Adventures

Refuge Part One -- Port Borough
Organizations and Neighborhoods of a Steel Age Fantasy *d20 System* City

by Owen K.C. Stephens

Most *d20 System* fantasy games are set in a campaign that borrows a lot from periods in our world's history, but take extensive liberties with those periods. It's much less common for the cities of these games to be based too strongly on a real-world location. Many of the things gamers take for granted (organized schools of magic with walled-off campuses, taverns on every corner, extensive middle-class shops were things can be bought off-the-rack) didn't commonly exist during the knights-and-swords era the campaigns try to emulate. And of course the influence of magic, especially the powerful magic typical of most *d20 System* fantasy games, is likely to change how a city is built, operated, and defended in ways no real city matches.

Since many gamers enjoy urban campaigns more than endless dungeon crawls and wilderness exploration, this leaves GMs needing cities that seem medieval, but are in fact more like modern communities with fantasy trappings. A fantasy city can help set the tone of a game acting as a base of operations, a source of adventures of its own, or an adversarial location from which numerous foes set out to make trouble for the PCs.

The tone of a game can be further tweaked by adding or removing particularly outrageous businesses. For example, if the campaign has Magic-R-Us, the custom magic item shop with a busty, broom-carrying sorceress as a corporate icon (franchised in 12 kingdoms!), PCs know the magic level for common people is high, and things may get a bit over-the-top. Similarly if you can order from the Ninja Rolls' Secret Delivery Restaurant, resulting in assassins sneaking the food into your backpack without you noticing, the campaign has taken a turn for the silly (especially in a city with a European flavor). Going the other direction, if the GM mentions the rows of small farms that ring the city for two days' travel in any direction, the players now more realistic concerns are being considered.

This article provides a look at the background of the fictional fantasy city of Refuge. Though specifically designed for a standard *d20 System* fantasy game, with a bit of work Refuge can be used as a setting (or one-shot vacation spot) for any fantasy game. The discussion of such *d20 System* tropes as magic shops, thieves' guilds, and court wizards are included for the standard game, but are not so pervasive they can't be toned down for more realistic settings or cranked up for over-the-top high fantasy. Each of the entries below presents a business, region, or group that exists in Refuge.

The main entry for each contain only common information anyone can turn up with minimal effort. Further information, including secrets behind the scenes, are presented with information check DCs listed. Since this is a *d20 System* article, such DCs are designed for use with Gather Information, Knowledge (local), Research, or similar *d20 System* skills or bardic lore checks. The information is not broken down by skill; it doesn't really matter what skill a PC uses to learn more about these places, just what information they can turn up. In most cases this information is just a sketch, leaving room for a GM to develop details to fit his campaign.

The City of Refuge: Overview

The city of Refuge is an independent city state located along the coast. It is not the largest trade city in the world, but it is nevertheless a popular stop for many merchant ships due to a combination of low tariffs and a policy of not searching ships or cargos that aren't intended for sale within Refuge. It's often claimed to be a pirate city, and it's certainly true it has deals with captains who can't claim any other city as home, but the city itself is ruled by a tyrant who has never left shore.

The city was originally established as an outpost for a neighboring empire. As the empire suffered losses, it left the

city to fend for itself. Without the empire's troops, many communities nearby were regularly raided by brigands and monsters. Survivors from those communities fled to the only walled city in the area, which quickly came to be called Refuge. Though physically strong, Refuge suffered years of internal political bickering as different groups struggled to claim rulership of the city, since the empire's governor no longer had the resources to maintain control.

Eventually a new king (known as the Domant) came into power, though his control was never absolute. In past generations, the city has been overrun by gangs, cults, and corrupt officials. Thirty years ago its fat, ineffective king died, and was replaced by a young, energetic son. The new Domant set out to clean up the city, and to a certain extent succeeded. Although corruption still exists, and many boroughs aren't safe at night, the thugs, gangs, and cults are much less powerful than they were when his reign began. Of course the Domant isn't young anymore, and no one is sure his "reforms" will last much longer, but so far he's replaced personal energy with a careful selection of underlings and alliances with those who have risen to power in the new city.

(The final installment of this series will include a rough map of the city, which is still in development.)

Organizations

Each major organization within Refuge is given a brief treatment in the description of its base of operations. A summary of the organizations is given here, since they're mentioned throughout the three articles detailing Refuge.

Military Groups

Refuge Guard: The elite warriors of Refuge, including its traditional knights. Drawn from the noble families, its loyalties are often divided among various rich families. Though the chief commanders are generally hand picked by the Domant, he can't be sure the Guard will support him against their patrons in case of a coup. They are funded by the Lower Court.

City Militia: The rank-and-file city watch, drawn from commoners. Paid and equipped by the Guild League, and often resentful of the Refuge Guard and their noble patrons. The Domant often keeps peace by placing the Militia in areas critical to the city's succees (public roads, docks, sewer entrances, marketplaces, and the outlying farms that support the city) and the refuge Guard in "high profile" areas (nobles' homes, the main gate, the royal yacht's dock). This results in both groups seeing themselves as the "real" defenders of the city. If the Domant must place Militia and Refuge Guard in the same area, a House Guard knight or Red Hawk is assigned to command over both forces.

House Guard: The Domant's private soldiers, loyal only to him.

Red Hawks: Elite soldiers and detectives loyal to Refuge first, and any of its factions second.

Political Organizations

The Domant: Legally the unquestioned ruler of Refuge, but realistically holds the post only as long as he can keep other groups in line.

Lower Court The council of the 12 most important nobles in Refuge. Have some authority in Refuge, but access to only their personal moneys rather than city taxes.

Guild League: An economic force made up of most of the craft and service businesses of the city.

Domant's Table A council of important people in Refuge, including lords, merchants, priests, and wizards. By law the Domant must consult them. Nothing says he must *listen* to them, and most previous Domants didn't. The current Domant has learned they are at the very least useful for finding what issues are genuinely bothering the various groups within Refuge.

Criminal Organizations

Criers: Officially, simply an organization that is paid to shout out laws, advertisements, and news. Unofficially, the largest organized crime gang in Refuge. Secretly, agents of the Domant.

Golden Mules: Officially, the porter's guild. Unofficially, smugglers and thieves.

House of Silks: Officially, simply a high-end provider of courtesans and companions. Unofficially, the thieves' guild for high-end, expensive products and drugs.

Ladies' Sewing Circle: Officially, advisors on all matters textile. Unofficially, rulers of the merchants in the Cloth Labyrinth.

Boroughs

Refuge has a number of boroughs, the most famous of which are detailed in brief below. There are numerous less-interesting sections of the city which serve as home and often employment opportunity for the majority of the city's citizens. In this installment we look at the biggest borough, the Port Borough, and the organizations most strongly associated with it.

Other Boroughs

Arches: The main market and craft center of the town, and home to the richest merchants and poorest nobles.

Canals: A failed experiment that's turned into an open-air sewer, the Canals is home to the smelliest industries (such as tanneries) and the poorest residents of Refuge.

The Shield: Land found between the two rivers that join to run through Refuge. Home of the Domant and other wealthy nobles in town.

Shingletown: The small neighborhood for the city's struggling middle class.

Port Borough

Much of Refuge's wealth comes from the sea, making the Port Borough an important part of the city. However, the constant influx of foreigners, sailors, and ruffians also makes it one of the most dangerous neighborhoods. To ensure peace throughout the rest of the city, the current Domant declared the Port Borough to be Within Refuge's Domain, but Outside the City. A wall cuts it off from the rest of the city, with only the Port Gate connecting the two. The people of the Port Borough were once resentful of their second-class status, but the new generation is proud they're so dangerous the common citizens fear them. People who live in this borough are generally called "dockers" or "port rats," and are seen by Refuge citizens as only one step up from thieves and beggars. For their part, Dockers see themselves as the lifeblood of Refuge.

Port Gate

Located at the western edge of the Port Borough, the Port Gate is a massive double door of wood and steel, backed by a portcullis and two massive towers. It is set into the city wall and kept open on most occasions. Catapults, facing out towards the Port Borough, sit atop the towers and walls, and no fewer than eight Refuge Guard are on duty here at all times.

The Port Gate is designed to overcome a significant flaw in the city's defenses. There is simply no way to prevent a

dedicated force of ship-borne invaders from landing in the Port Borough. The number of docks there is too great to be patrolled, and cannot be effectively cut without hurting the city's economy. Refuge lacks a navy strong enough to ensure it controls the seas around its harbor, and its deals with privateers won't hold up to a serious invasion. However, Refuge's main value is as a port and market, so any force attacking it is likely to try to capture it largely intact. That means a land force, rather than bombardment by sea.

A short wall exists just west of the docks themselves, but these have numerous gates to ensure the easy passage of cargo from ships into the Port Borough. A dedicated invasion could overcome this wall and lay claim to the Borough in just a day or two. To prevent such an invasion from ever breaching into central Refuge, the rest of the city is both walled separately and guarded by this gate. An invader who took the Port Borough would be forced to breach yet another defensive wall while facing fire from the Port Gate and its towers. No invader has ever been willing to pay the high cost in lives such a siege would require.

The other function of the Port Gate is to quell rioting in the Port Borough. Though no riots have required it to be shut in years, in Refuge's past such mob scenes were not unusual. Rather than fight to retake the Borough, the Domant simply closed the gate and let the rioters exhaust themselves. The Gate is still closed for a few hours at least once a month, to prove to the population that is still works and to remind them the cost of rebellion. Many citizens believe the gates are closed when the Refuge Guard is seeking some criminal they believe to be fleeing, but this is not true. Only agents of the Domant and the Red Hawks have the authority to close the gate, and this is done only rarely.

Most Refuge Guards assigned to guard the Gate considered it trash duty, as little of interest ever occurs here. However the commander, Sir Pepin Lachlan, doesn't allow such an attitude to affect his men's performance of their duties. He sees command of the Port Gate a sign of great trust from the Domant, and an indication he's destined for great things in the future. Pepin is extremely vane, and can often be convinced to look the other way while contraband is brought through if he's complimented enough. Attempts at bribery, however, offend his sense of duty, and bring down his wrath on the offender.

Heretic's Dock

Heretic's Dock is the main point of landing for foreign ships -- that is, any ship not owned or operated by a native landowner of Refuge, or carrying a letter of lading from the Domant's court. This long peer is also the main slip for passenger ships. As many as six passenger ships arrive at the Dock each day, on a tight schedule designed to prevent two ships ever coming close to one another. The Dock is well patrolled by 12-24 Refuge Guards at all times, and kept under observation from the Militia on the nearby wall. Should a hostile force ever unload here, it would face both a squad of Guard (with more arriving soon), and catapult fire from the Militia on the wall.

Back when Refuge was effectively ruled by religious cults, the Heretic's Dock was the only place a ship could land if it didn't have a religious patron in town (hence the name). Since the new Domant took firmer control of the city and excised the worst cults, anyone with a connection to a resident can use any dock, and most regular ships make enough contacts to avoid Heretic's Dock. But ships arriving for the first time, or those firmly sworn to foreign powers and unwilling to make local contacts, must still make due with the second-rate facilities here, and haul their goods farther to reach anything in the city.

The Lighthouse

The Lighthouse is built into the westernmost wall of the Port Borough. It is a very tall stone tower, topped by a massive, eternal flame that was created by the court mages of the Domant. The Lighthouse was built early in the current Domant's reign as a navigational beacon, and then used as the marker for where the Port Borough ends. The Lighthouse can only be accessed from the walls surrounding the district, and is patrolled and maintained by Refuge Guards.

The Lighthouse serves two important functions -- it allows ships seeking Refuge to find it from a great distance at sea (important since the seas are often overcast with mist and fog), and know how far they are from the port. The Guard

also use it as an observation post, allowing them to examine incoming ships with spyglasses long before the ship can gain similar details.

A less important but still noteworthy function of the Lighthouse is to serve as an icon for the reign of the new Domant. It's a symbol of harsh illumination and guidance, a fair description of how the Domant wishes to be seen. The Lighthouse is a symbol of a hard rule that burns those who ignore it. Life in Refuge is harsh, but those who give the Domant unquestioning loyalty are offered some level of security. This is symbolic of the way following the Lighthouse allows a ship to come into Refuge's harbor, avoiding other hazards, but also guides the ship to a place where dues and tariffs can be heavy.

A giant polished copper mirror directs the light of the Lighthouse, allowing it to shine a bright spotlight on any point within a few miles. Normally, this is used to shine the structure's light out across the ocean, scanning back and forth to be seen from the greatest distance. In rare cases the mirror directs the light into the Port Borough, allowing it to turn an area a hundred feet across into a zone of illumination equal to the brightness of the hour just before dawn. Though this hasn't been done it years, in the early days of the Lighthouse it was common to use this trick to light up an area just before a raid by the Refuge Guard.

Freejack's Landing

The best maintained and most convenient dock in Refuge. It is reserved for ships that have a mutual defense pact with the Domant, meaning they agree to defend Refuge in times of war and in turn can take asylum in its harbor. Captains willing to make such deals generally don't fly the flag (or "jack") of any other country, and are thus called freejacks. Others call them pirates, privateers, and freebooters.

Lore Check

DC 15: Although a freejack captain must have a deal in place with the Domant to use this dock, it is the Lesser Court that controls and maintains it. The families of the Lesser Court own all the warehouses and porters around the dock, and thus make considerable money off it even without access to the taxes levied on ship's cargoes. The Refuge Guard keeps a regular presence here.

Guildhouse

This vast building is officially the guildhouse of the Guild League, a coalition of all craftsmen and most merchants within Refuge. Realistically, it's the center of the Port's day-to-day government. Although the most important decisions come from the Domant's castle, such rulings are fairly rare as long as the League keep the money flowing in and no riots break out. In addition to running the Port, the Guild League has supervisory authority over anyone who makes a good, offers a service for coin, or sells a durable product within Refuge. Makes of consumables (food, drink, and even clothing) are exempt as the Domant dislikes driving up the price of such things. Similarly those who offer services for room and board are exempt, to ensure the noble class can have cheap servants and offer patronage to artists.

The guildhouse includes many meeting halls, warehouses, lounges, and apartments reserved for use by the senior members of the League as well as the head offices for the various branches of the League's organization. Generally decisions on who is allowed to use the regular docks (as opposed to the Heretic's Dock), who can move cargo without having it inspected, who can set up a shop within Refuge, what taxes are levied, and how much the Militia is paid are made within the building, though all such authority is granted by the Domant, who takes it back whenever he feels the League has made a mistake.

The Guild League also decides who can call themselves an apprentice of a craft within Refuge, who a journeyman, who a master, and who a grandmaster. Even the Domant may not override this one right of the League. Such distinctions are critical, as goods and services provided by a mere apprentice don't command as high a price (reduce gp

cost by 25%), while masters and grandmasters make considerably more money for the same work (increase gp cost by 25%). The League generally charges 100 gp to "consider" a candidate for each of these ranks, and may insist on a certain number of years of apprenticeship. Many grandmasters within the city do no work at all, instead forcing hopeful journeyman to run their shops for minimal pay, in the hopes the master will support a bid to upgrade the journeyman to master in a few years.

Lore Checks

DC 10: Control of the guildhouse is shared by numerous guild masters within the League -- armorers may run things one month while apothecaries call the shots the next. This is done to prevent any one group within the coalition from gaining too much control, but it also makes the internal workings of the guildhouse too complex for a casual citizen to understand. This is seen as an added bonus by the League, which insist everyone follow the regulations of the guilds, but prefers not to have to explain them.

DC 15: It's not unusual for ranking members of the Guild League to use the guildhouse to meet with the leaders of more minor guilds or individuals who seek the League's patronage. The back rooms of the guildhouse have seen many secret deals and offers of reciprocal aid made, in large part because they are soundproof and warded against prying spells. An invitation to the guildhouse is normally a sign of favor with the League, or at least a good opportunity.

Alley Alehouse

The Alley Alehouse is a working brewery and a public house. However, it's designed to be unappealing to the public. The main entrance is always closed, and the rooms nearest the main street never used. As far as a casual examination goes, this building is abandoned, and the Alehouse out of business. Since many inns throughout Refuge serve Alley Ale (a specialty local drink), travelers often ask why the inn is closed. Locals just shrug and claim it went out of business last month or so. Locals have been saying that for years.

The fact is, the Alehouse is open all day every day, but the entrance is actually off the narrow alley that runs behind it. Anyone who knows this can sneak up on a door that looks nailed shut (it's not) and whisper the current password. Or any password that's been recent in the past six months. Or just slip 1 gp under the door. Once you know the trick of the Alehouse, it's not hard to get in. The secrecy is designed only to keep most outsiders away, giving Refuge natives and well-liked travelers a place to get together away from the hustle and bustle of the city. The Militia is well aware of the deception, but as long as the Alehouse stays quite they don't care (in fact many Militia men go here for drinks after a long patrol).

Lore Checks

DC 10: Any of a range of passwords is enough to gain access to the Alehouse. (PC also learns an old password.)

DC 15: The Alehouse is run by Allard Wynne, a skilled brewer and merchant. He makes most of his money by selling his beers and ales to other inns in town, who happily mark it up and sell it to foreigners. Because of this he can keep prices within the Alehouse quite low. He also has more brewer equipment than he ever needs, and often lets customers use it for as little as 10 gp/week to create their own brews. On the first of every month, a contest is held to see what customer-made brew is the worst, with all patrons sipping and voting (though there is no prize other than free drinks for the rest of that night).

DC 20: The materials and equipment in the Alehouse are also sufficient to allow the brewing of magic potions or materials of alchemy, and a few underground spellcasters rent it out for that purpose as well.

Blubbering Whale

The Blubbering Whale is the largest building found directly on the docks in the Port Borough. Facing the main peers,

the roost is a convenient place for ship crews and captains to rest while waiting for a cargo or dealing with the Militia assigned to port control. Locals often stay at the Whale as well, using its common room to gather and unwind after a day of hauling cargo or fishing on the nearby peer.

The Whale's simple stone structure has become a home-away-from home for many visitors to Refuge, and welcomes members of every race and social class. Most rooms are small, though a few suites exist, but the drink and food are cheap and plentiful. No violence is tolerated, with enough off-duty Militia guards and Guild League kneebreakers spending time at the Whale to enforce this rule.

Baden Daire, an older woman who was never a great beauty, owns and operates the Whale, though she always has a fair-sized staff to help. Baden spent time at sea when she was young, and rumor claims she was a pirate before she settled down. She certainly knows the concerns of ship captains, and manages to be friendly and stern at the same time. She is extremely popular with many residents of the Port, as well as her regulars.

Lore Check

DC 10: Baden also runs a small ring of professional courtesans, who rent out rooms in the Whale and visit captains in their ships. She's very protective of the men and women who work for her in this capacity, and vengeful toward those who mistreat them.

DC 15: Baden is well-connected, and act as an information broker as well as an innkeeper, directing business to Guild League-run shops and trouble to Militia-patrolled areas. A visitor may not be able to find everything at the Blubbering Whale, but he will be told who knows where it might be for sale, trade or theft.

Cloth Labyrinth

The Cloth Labyrinth is a large open-air bazaar set up in the southern stretch of the Port Borough, and accessed by the Southern Gate. It is a barely regulated market for out-of-town merchants to sell their wares. Though inside the Port Wall, the Cloth labyrinth is officially not patrolled by any force of Refuge (though the Militia goes in from time to time), and being allowed into the Southern gate is no guarantee of access to the rest of Refuge. The Labyrinth is nominally controlled by the Guild League, who officially have final say regarding who can set up shop in the area, but often have difficulty enforcing their decrees.

The Guild League has a few simple rules. Sellers must not have shops within Refuge itself. Sellers may not set up permanent buildings or stay longer than 20 days. Sellers must pay the Guild League a tax of 10% of all monies made. Sellers may not block free access to the booths or stalls of other merchants. Sellers may only operate during the hours of daylight. Sellers may not sell anything of a harmful or controversial nature. All disputes are decided by the League, and any judgments are final and can't be appealed.

In reality, many of these rules are ignored because they cannot be enforced. Merchants set up their tents in one spot for a few weeks, then move to another to avoid the 20-day limit. Items the League would never approve of are sold openly whenever the Militia isn't present, and sales continue after nightfall behind tent flaps. Merchants with shops within Refuge allow their apprentices to sell damaged or out-of-date wares under assumed names. And the whole bazaar is a constant war of pavilions, tents, awnings and roped-off yards that shifts daily, with every stall vying for the best position in the ever-changing "streets" of walking trails. Only someone who is too lazy to move about, too stupid to conceal illegal activity, or too unpopular for his neighbors to not rat him out actually has much to fear from violating the Guild League's rules. Some people actually live in the Cloth Labyrinth, preferring it's permissive environment to the rules and stone of Refuge.

The Domant allows the Labyrinth for several reasons. First, while the merchants clearly cheat on their taxes paid, it still brings in a fair bit of income for little cost. Second, the ruler of Refuge assumes smuggling, black market deals, and shady trade practices are going to occur. By turning a blind eye to such things in the Labyrinth (which is officially outside his city, after all), he cuts down on such crimes within the walls. This both makes some neighborhoods safer,

and allows the Domant to simply close the city gates if he wants to cut off some product from the city streets. Third, the existence of the Labyrinth encourages merchants from far away lands to come to Refuge, which helps bring news of politics in those lands. The Red Hawks often patrol the Labyrinth to gather information on far away events that could impact the safety of Refuge. Finally, the Labyrinth is rife with spies from foreign powers, who the Domant sometimes uses to carry on unofficial diplomatic missions with both allies and enemies.

The wide array of craftsmen and merchants allow nearly anything to be bought or arranged for in the Labyrinth. Things with a cost of 300 gp or less can be tracked down in a hour. Anything pricier than that requires a Gather Information check or Bardic Lore check (DC 10 +1 per 1,000 gp of the price). There's a 1% chance per 1,000 gp of an item's cost that it's not currently available, but can be brought in 2-6 weeks if a 20% down-payment is made.

Lore Checks

DC 10: Despite the strict rules the Guild League claims rule the Cloth Labyrinth, the best merchants are here full time. Nearly anything can be found for sale here, if you have the time and the money.

DC 15: Since they can't depend on the Militia for protection or the League for quality control, the residents and regular merchants of the Labyrinth have developed their own government, the Lady's Sewing Circle. As the name suggests, its membership is mostly women, though many have nothing to do with sewing. The Sewing Circle has a rotating membership of councilors who publicly offer advice on all matters textile, and privately hear grievances regarding the Labyrinth. Since textiles are outside the Guild League's purview, the Sewing Circle even operates within Refuge itself.

DC 15: Whenever possible, the Sewing Circle solves problems with negotiation and diplomacy. When that proves impossible, they turn to the stronger and rougher members of the Labyrinth's merchants to form a brute squad. Such squads seek out a troublemaker and deal with him with as much force as is needed. Brute Squads always operate at night, and wear masks (sewn by the Circle) to hide their identity. Few people risk the ire of the circle twice, and those who do are often found dead, with eyes and mouth sewn shut.

DC 25: The Sewing Circle is currently run by Selma Hagan, a young woman who arrived in the Labyrinth just two years ago. Officially Selma is a washerwoman, cleaning and mending clothes brought to her stall with the help of her two "bleachers" (big albino thugs who rarely speak and answer only to her). In truth Selma is a professional assassin who fled to Refuge when she killed a king's heir. She originally intended to stay only a few months, and joined the Circle to keep an eye on anyone who might recognize her. She quickly found she had a flair for solving problems, especially as she could sometimes kill troublemakers without calling in a Brute Squad, and rose to lead the organization. She has learned to enjoy being a petty noble of a squatter's town, and isn't sure she's ever going to leave.

Next Month

In the next Icosahedron Adventures, we take a look at the richest and poorest boroughs of Refuge -- The Shield, and the Canals.

Further reading

Anyone looking for more advice for medieval cities (especially more realistic cities or *d20 System* specific advice) may want to consider any one of these articles: "GM's Workbench: From the Ground Up" and Urban Adventuring Made Easy"; "Get Out and Stay Out!" ; "On Cities Part I," "Part II," and "Part III"; "Real Unions for Fantasy Games."

Or just do author searches for Matt Riggsby and S.E. Mortimer. Both have numerous articles with information to make any fantasy city both more realistic and more interesting.

Space Station Peregrine

By Paul Drye

Homeline is on the cutting edge of only one field of technology: parachronics. In all other endeavors, timelines such as Shikaku-Mon, Caliph, and Gernsback surpass it. In most cases, there's little to be done except bring back technology and knowledge, and pass it along to Homeline scientists in the hope of catching up. When it comes to space travel, however, Homeliners have a peculiar advantage.

Zero-G

Travel in the reaches of Homeline's solar system doesn't happen any more. There were signs of it recovering from the post-Apollo lull, but when Paul Van Zandt discovered timeline travel, the industry collapsed in a short period of time. Excepting the need for weather and communications satellites, the money spent on space exploitation was used to explore alternate timelines instead. The last Homeline astronaut retired some time ago, and only China's automated asteroid mining projects --made practical because it's expensive to bring enormous amounts of iron through on conveyors -- keeps Homeline from having no presence outside of low earth orbit.

On the other hand, now Homeline didn't have *one* Earth worth watching from space . . . they had dozens, even hundreds. Some of them were advanced enough that they were already watching from orbit themselves, and Homeliners could tap into that. On primitive and empty timelines, however, agents were left without basic tools like weather prediction and comsats.

Putting space infrastructure in place around every world of interest was prohibitively expensive, but some creative thinking by the brains at Paralabs came up with a way around this. There were a few timelines like Lenin-2 and Vanish where a Space Age society had collapsed and equipment was free for the taking, if you could get into orbit. There were also a few where there was no Earth: a vehicle headed there popped into freefall. Combine the two and you had a plan, as one could drop a spacecraft into an Earth-less line, use a slow-but-cheap ion engine to build up a precise velocity, then cut over into the near-Earth space of another timeline in a stable orbit. After grabbing a satellite, one could then reverse the procedure, taking the booty to where it would do Homeline's bidding.

After some initial proofs of concept, the main benefactors of the plan -- the Survey and Surveillance divisions -- teamed up to acquire a permanent base for the project. After all, if you could go for little stuff in orbit, why not bigger?

Peregrine

The heist involved Grishin-1, where the collapse of the Soviet Union was far messier than on Homeline. A hard-line General Secretary provoked a war over East Germany in 1991, and the eventual nuclear exchange couldn't be stopped before full escalation. Years later the Earth in that line was still in bad shape; the United States' space stations had largely fallen out of orbit, and people were too busy trying to survive to watch the straggler Liberty. Infinity moved in, sent the mummified corpses of its last residents out the airlock, then hooked the station up to its own projector. Then they jumped it crosstime into orbit high above the American colony ay New Colorado where it served as a weather observation station and communications relay while it was being refitted.

The long-term plan, though, and the mission on which Liberty -- now renamed Peregrine -- has been embarked for the last four years, is as a movable base for Infinity's orbital efforts. Its projector is the key to this; with it, Peregrine can relocate to a 200-mile high orbit around any Earth on Quantum-5, and with a side trip to Homeline it can even move between timelines on different Quanta. The sole exception is those where some massive event has noticeably changed the mass of the planet or, more rarely, that of the Sun or the Moon. As long as the Earth is the same physically, Peregrine has the right velocity and position to stay in a stable orbit when it hops from one line to another. It will stay

in one location for a month or so, fulfilling whatever job it's assigned, then it moves on to the next item on the agenda.

The station is built around a Space Shuttle external fuel tank, which was put in orbit by Grishin-1's United States in 1984, cleaned, and refitted. Inside it has been subdivided into 10 sleeping areas toward the rear, a large common room and kitchen in the center, and a work area. Above the tank a truss connects to four solar panels that power the station, while below a series of radiators removes waste heat. Peregrine's projector and a large capacitor are attached to the top of the solar panels. Assuming the usual amount of light coming from the Sun (that has not been the case on missions to a few timelines!), the capacitor needs to be charged for 40 hours between transitions from timeline to timeline.

The station also has four subsections at its cardinal points. To aft is the ion engine added by Infinity; a tank containing a ton of liquefied krypton gas is within the main body of the station. The engine is used for adjustments to the station's orbit, including countering orbital decay. To forward is a command station, which runs both a communications relay and a large package of survey equipment. On the station's port side is Infinity's other major addition, the isolation quarters: a lab, life support module, and crowded accommodations for four people. These quarters are connected to the station by a truss that passes along electrical power and removes waste heat. Otherwise it is completely disconnected from the rest of the station. Even communications are handled via radio to the relay on the command station. At the starboard side of the station is an access tube to the dock for the station's two shuttles; one of the shuttles can also dock with the isolated quarters.

The station is used mostly for orbital surveys of new timelines where -- for whatever reason -- one of Infinity's bureaus can't get the information it needs from probes inserted on the ground. Peregrine also makes a useful base for training agents who are going to be in 0-g, usually on lines with large orbital presences. Space is at a premium on Homeline's wandering station, but a few days is enough for someone to get a feel for free fall, and for Infinity to see how he handles space sickness.

Emissary and Envoy

Shorter crosstime missions are handled by the workhorses of the station, its shuttles *Emissary* and *Envoy*. Both are refurbished spaceplanes, similar to the canceled Homeline X-38 though more advanced. On arrival at a destination timeline, they normally stay in orbit to surveil but they can also coast into any earthly location its occupants desire, using a parasail to slow down and steer after entering the atmosphere. When it's time to leave, each has its own built-in conveyor and a bolted-on ion engine under a heat shield. Using the conveyor a shuttle goes to the Earth-less Aterra-1 timeline (described below), then discards the shield and uses the engine and some high efficiency solar panels to build up the necessary velocity to match up with Peregrine. It then transits again and docks with its mother station around whichever version of the Earth it happens to be orbiting. This normally takes about three days, which is half the life-support limit of the shuttles. This limit resets every time a shuttle docks with Peregrine, or spends more than 12 hours on Earth.

In most cases it's easier to use a regular conveyor when planning to land on a new timeline; if you want to end up on the ground, start on the ground. However, a space approach does allow for a mission abort that's difficult with pure point-to-point travel. Any time Infinity feels a need to keep a bit of distance from a destination -- especially a new timeline where it's difficult to plan due to lack of information -- the Peregrine and its shuttles are considered. A good example is Gotha and other plague lines where putting the agents in a shuttle with a three-day-long return/incubation period (with the added potential of housing them in the isolation section of a station away from Homeline) is a wise precaution.

More often, though, the station's missions are space-related. The shuttles stay in orbit, and are used for spying or even rendezvous with native space assets if the natives won't notice.

The Aterran Timeline

Discovered in 1999, Aterra-1 was a curiosity until Infinity hit on the idea of using it for easy access to space. To all appearances it was a perfectly normal timeline with a small difference that was big only from the standpoint of

parochial humans: there was no Earth. The Sun was there, and so were the other planets and the rest of the galaxy so far as anyone can tell, but there was no trace of the third planet. The Moon circled the sun by itself as the smallest of the planets, though in an eccentric orbit. So far, differences in its orbital inclination and eccentricity as compared to Peregrine have kept its shuttles from getting too close to the moon: the nearest approach was a little over a million kilometers four years ago. Back then that was still too far away for easy access, though the station's higher-ups are planning on sending *Emissary* for a look at the next close approach,

Manning the Station

Peregrine was designed for eight people for three months; transferring supplies back and forth via crosstime jaunts is easy enough that it can support 10 for four weeks at a time. In times of crisis, four more people can be housed in the isolation quarters, and two on each of the shuttles for a total of 18. When that happens, though, the station's life support is good for only a week before it needs a supply delivery from Homeline.

As well as rotating personnel, the station has several permanent crew. In some campaigns these positions may be filled by players' characters, but if the adventurers are just visiting the "careerists" can play valuable roles.

Captain Anatoly Baika

A former Russian astronaut, and the youngest to fly aboard Homeline's last station (the USSR's *Mir*), Anatoly was recruited by Infinity Incorporated as an agent in 2001. His area of expertise was working in the orbital facilities of advanced timelines, and he has seen every kind of space technology in his 30-year career. Now 59 years old, he's been the commander of Peregrine since it started its mission; it's widely acknowledged by Infinity personnel that his experience aboard Mir and with free fall in general makes him invaluable.

The Captain is short, just 5'8" and 150 pounds, with dark gray hair in an astronaut's buzz cut. He's in good health for his age, but worries correctly that if that ever changes he will be relieved of duty -- Peregrine is just too isolated for long periods of time for it to be otherwise.

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, he became a devout -- if quiet -- member of the Russian Orthodox Church. Most people don't find out about this unless they go in his quarters: there he has a small icon of the Virgin Mary surrounded by cunningly crafted penlights made to resemble candles.

Captain Anatoly Baika   *134 points*

Attributes: **ST** 10 [0]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 10 [0].
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 10 [0].
Basic Speed 5.5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 9 (Brawling).

Languages: English (Accented/Native) [5]; Mandarin Chinese (Broken/None) [1]; Russian (Native) [0].

Advantages: Improved G-Tolerance (0.3G) [5]; Military Rank 3 (Captain of the Peregrine) [15].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Soldier's) [-10]; Sense of Duty (Crew of the Peregrine) (Small Group) [-5]; Xenophilia (12 or less) [-10].

Quirks: Careful; Mutters in Russian; Prefers Zero-G [-3].

Skills: Area Knowledge (Earth from Orbit)-14 (IQ+2) [4]; Brawling-13 (DX+1) [2]; Free Fall-15 (DX+3) [12]; Guns/TL8 (Pistol)-14 (DX+2) [4]; Piloting/TL8 (Aerospace)-16 (DX+4) [16]; Savoir-Faire (Military)-12 (IQ+0) [1]; Spacer/TL8-16 (IQ+4) [12]; Theology (Orthodox Christianity)-10 (IQ-2) [1]; Vacc Suit/TL8-13 (DX+1) [4].

Yun Ha-Neul

Mission Specialist Yun is the station's chief surveyor, which is to say she is in charge of running the survey equipment in combination with a few temporary staff assigned for specific missions. When Peregrine is short on people she works all of it herself, if more slowly.

Ha-Neul is a Korean woman of average height and weight. Her appearance is quite bookish, with long, plainly styled black hair and round glasses.

Her area of expertise means that she's the one who first assesses a new world. She can read the results from her survey equipment, and note every place this Earth diverges from Homeline. She's particularly good at using satellite photos to figure out where a timeline's most advanced culture can be found, and just how advanced they are.

A former member of the Korean Army, she learned her trade looking surreptitiously across the border using every tool the West had to offer. Since coming aboard, she's also developed a good feel for what the Earth "should" be like -- not only its physical outlines, but a sense if she's seeing too many or too few city lights at night, how much radio chatter Peregrine is picking up, and other details that give an idea of what she and the rest of the crew are up against.

Her background got her interested in tactics as well, and her main hobby is learning every strategy game the world has to offer. She mastered Go many years ago, and is currently working on chess. In particular, she likes taking unconventional (and suicidal) handicaps like having no queen and only one rook, then winning anyway unless her opponent is skilled.

Yun Ha-Neul   *150 points*

Attributes: **ST** 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 15 [100]; **HT** 10 [0].
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 15 [0]; Per 15 [0]; FP 10 [0].
Basic Speed 5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 0.

Languages: Arabic (Broken/None) [1]; English (Accented/Native) [5]; French (Broken/None) [1]; German (Broken/None) [1]; Korean (Native) [0]; Mandarin Chinese (Accented/None) [2]; Russian (Broken/None) [1].

Advantages: Cultural Adaptability [10]; Military Rank (Second-in-Command of the Peregrine) 2 [10]; Single-Minded [5].

Disadvantages: Bad Sight (Nearsighted) (Glasses) [-10]; Curious (12 or less) [-5]; Pacifism (Reluctant Killer) [-5]; Vow (Vegetarian) (Minor) [-5].

Quirks: Always suggesting chess if there's nothing to do; Doesn't like riding horses; Hates when people assume she knows martial arts [-3].

Skills: Architecture/TL8-14 (IQ-1) [1]; Camouflage-16 (IQ+1) [2]; Cartography/TL8-16 (IQ+1) [4]; Computer Operation/TL8-16 (IQ+1) [2]; Cryptography/TL8-14 (IQ-1) [2]; Economics-13 (IQ-2) [1]; Engineer/TL8 (Electronics)-14 (IQ-1) [2]; Free Fall-11 (DX+1) [4]; Games (Chess)-17 (IQ+2) [4]; Games (Go)-17 (IQ+2) [4]; Geology/TL8 (Earthlike)-14 (IQ-1) [2]; History (Modern Era)-15 (IQ+0) [4]; Mathematics/TL8 (Applied)-13 (IQ-2) [1]; Meteorology/TL8 (Earthlike)-14 (IQ-1) [1]; Photography/TL8-15 (IQ+0) [2]; Sociology-13 (IQ-2) [1]; Tactics-15 (IQ+0) [4]; Vacc Suit/TL8-9 (DX-1) [1]. (((END BOX)))

Dr. Sergio de Assis Tostes

"The Doc" is Peregrine's expert on parachronic physics. This means he runs the projector perched on top of the station, but he is also in charge of analyzing new timelines for differences in physical laws. He looks for oddities like strange square-cube laws (in the manner of Microworld), impossible technologies (like on Lucifer-5), and mana use.

Captain Baika was profoundly unhappy when Dr. de Assis Tostes was first assigned to the station, since at first impression he's quite insane. He's obsessed with the physical differences between timelines, and is pursuing a mad theory that projector-capable timelines (in particular, Homeline) are susceptible to massive changes in nature's laws. He believes Aterra-1 is another example, and that led to the destruction of that timeline's Earth; the fact that the station's projector can't move it to other Quanta from there is explained away by the disaster. Whether this is genius or insanity is hard to say. He hasn't managed to convince anyone else, at least.

Shortly after he came on board, the Doctor gained Baika's trust. Crazy or not, he's committed to keeping the station flying. (How better else to prove his theories?) When he can be shifted off his obsession, he's even a charming and seemingly normal man. Most of the time, though, he lives in makeshift quarters set up in the access corridor between the main body of Peregrine and the conveyor. Visitors might not meet him at all, as he prefers to talk to the other crew through the comm system, so he doesn't have to leave his beloved experiments.

Dr. Sergio de Assis Tostes   *150 points*

Attributes: **ST** 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 17 [140]; **HT** 10 [0].
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 17 [0]; Per 17 [0]; FP 10 [0].
Basic Speed 5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 0.

Languages: Brazilian Portuguese (Native) [0]; English (Accented/Broken) [3].

Advantages: Absolute Timing [2]; Photographic Memory [10]; Single-Minded [5].

Disadvantages: Appearance (Unattractive) [-4]; Bad Sight (Farsighted) (Glasses) [-10]; Clueless [-10]; Loner (12 or less) [-5]; Obsession (Understand why timelines have different physical laws) (Long-Term Goal) (6 or less) [-20]; Reputation (Nut) -2 (All the time; Anyone with training in parachronics or cliodynamics) [-5].

Quirks: Forgets to eat; Prefers to stay in his quarters; Sleeps in his clothes; Takes forever to get to the point [-4].

Skills: Electronics Operation/TL8 (Parachronic)-16 (IQ-1) [1]; Electronics Operation/TL8 (Scientific)-17 (IQ+0) [2]; Electronics Repair/TL8 (Parachronic)-17 (IQ+0) [2]; Electronics Repair/TL8 (Scientific)-16 (IQ-1) [1]; Engineer/TL8 (Electronics)-16 (IQ-1) [2]; Engineer/TL8 (Parachronic)-17 (IQ+0) [4]; Expert Skill (Cliodynamics)-17 (IQ+0) [4]; Expert Skill (Computer Security)-15 (IQ-2) [1]; Expert Skill (Physics)-19 (IQ+2) [12]; Free Fall-9 (DX-1) [1]; Geology/TL8 (Earthlike)-15 (IQ-2) [1]; Mathematics/TL8 (Applied)-15 (IQ-2) [1]; Mathematics/TL8 (Pure)-18 (IQ+1) [8]; Physics/TL8-14 (IQ-3) [1]; Research/TL8-17 (IQ+0) [2]; Vacc Suit/TL8-9 (DX-1) [1]; Weird Science-16 (IQ-1) [4].

Cody Wheelright

The station's shuttle pilot, he was -- until two years ago -- a test pilot for the US Air Force. After using an X-54 to make a crater in New Mexico, he was sidelined from active duty, then assigned to Peregrine. Some days he desperately wishes he was back home doing what he loved, other days he revels in taking space planes out for spins on new timelines.

Most of the time he looks and acts the part of the cocky test pilot. He's physically fit and clean cut, and annoyingly gung-ho. To some extent this is over-compensation for his humiliation over the X-54. He's also spooked by the station. He dwells on the fact that people died aboard the Peregrine before she was drafted by Infinity, and sometimes thinks he hears strange sounds when the SET is dark.

Cody Wheelright   *146 points*

Attributes: **ST** 11 [10]; **DX** 13 [60]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 11 [10].

Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 6 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 9; Parry 9 (Judo).

Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages: 3D Spatial Sense [10]; Appearance (Attractive) [4]; Fit [5]; Improved G-Tolerance (0.3G) [5].

Disadvantages: Compulsive Carousing (12 or less) [-5]; Phobia (Ghosts) -1 (12 or less) [-5].

Quirks: A little too enthusiastic about action; Affects a Southern accent even though he's from Oregon; Broods over crashing the X-54 [-3].

Skills: Carousing-13 (HT+2) [4]; Current Affairs/TL8 (Sports)-11 (IQ+1) [2]; Driving/TL8 (Automobile)-13 (DX+0) [2]; Electronics Operation/TL8 (Electronic Warfare)-9 (IQ-1) [1]; Gunner/TL8 (Machine Gun)-13 (DX+0) [1]; Gunner/TL8 (Rockets)-13 (DX+0) [1]; Guns/TL8 (Pistol)-14 (DX+1) [1]; Guns/TL8 (Rifle)-15 (DX+2) [4]; Guns/TL8 (Submachine Gun)-14 (DX+1) [1]; Judo-13 (DX+0) [4]; Piloting/TL8 (Aerospace)-15 (DX+2) [1]; Piloting/TL8 (High-Performance Airplane)-17 (DX+4) [12]; Piloting/TL8 (Low-Performance Spacecraft)-16 (DX+3) [8]; Savoir-Faire (Military)-11 (IQ+1) [2]; Sex Appeal-13 (HT+2) [4]; Spacer/TL8-11 (IQ+1) [2]; Tactics-10 (IQ+0) [4]; Vacc Suit/TL8-12 (DX-1) [1].

Adventure Seeds

That Can't Be Good: After four years of transiting through Aterra-1, the Powers That Be have finally scheduled a mission to go take a look at the Moon in the hopes of getting some clues as to the timeline's change point. The orphaned body will be swinging less than a million kilometers from Peregrine. One of the shuttles is to dock with a decommissioned four-man lander purchased on Detente-3 and then the whole assembly will be fired into lunar orbit for a look.

Upon arrival, however, things are rather different than expected. The theory was that there'd be some newly rearranged terrain thanks to the Earth's tidal forces being removed from the Moon, but something far more serious must have gone on. The Moon is badly battered and partially roasted; there is residual radiation which is a potential problem over the course of the time that the crew was supposed to explore. Still, there'll be no other opportunity to investigate for years more, and that much devastation begs for investigation. What if whatever caused it comes back? Up to four brave souls can head to the surface . . .

Not a Lost World, Just Misplaced: About 130 million years ago, most Earths had a large magma pulse in the southern Indian Ocean which, over time, produced a small continent. On Homeline (and the real Earth) this land has all but disappeared -- only the small, sub-antarctic Kerguelen Islands remain. On a few timelines, though, it stayed above the water line. Unfortunately, it's difficult to explore: the point-to-point nature of parachronic travel means that a projector has to be placed several thousand miles from the nearest inhabited land before a transition to "Kerguelania" can be made. There are also no known Kerguelanian lines with civilized humans, so even jumping from elsewhere on Earth then chartering a boat is impossible.

The Survey Division has decided to investigate using a pre-existing asset rather than set up a new base on Homeline's Kerguelen. Peregrine's crew is assigned to use a shuttle and land on the surface of Laetoli-2, which has a large Kerguelania about the size of Greenland. Upon arrival they will find a cold paradise of dense pine forests and flightless birds that -- with an entire continent free of mammals -- have got back in touch with their inner dinosaurs and evolved into every available ecological niche. They will also find evidence that someone from Homeline has been here before. The Homeline Kerguelens are owned by France: has their notoriously difficult government been up to something on the sly? Or is there a more sinister plot underway?

Out In The Great Wide Open: A transition error has left Peregrine in orbit around an Earth that can pick them up on radar and -- more importantly -- send someone up to investigate. Can the crew get the station off and away before the Secret is shattered?

Pyramid Review

CyborGladiators

Published by [Firefly Games](#)

Written by David L. Pulver, Marc A. Vézina, Scott Bennie, Mark Arsenault, & Patrick Sweeney

Art by Bart Willard, Bryce Nakagawa, & Richard Cox

Edited by Patrick Sweeney

64-page b&w softcover; $14.95

Let's not kid ourselves. A game like *CyborGladiators,* about man-to-man combat among enhanced humanoids, isn't exactly a new concept. But give the fine folks at Firefly Games their props, because they've managed to make it feel fresh and new.

The background is pretty straightforward. Aliens called the Dzerini drop by planets once in a while, collect a few promising specimens (like, say, humans), and use them as pawns in a galactic game of mortal combat. Not all aliens are created equal, of course -- some of them might have a thick carapace on their backs -- so it may be necessary to *re*create them equally. If you die in the arena, oh well. You probably weren't going to be worth sponsoring anyway. On the other hand, if you show that you can take on an enemy who's a little bit bigger or a tiny bit faster than you, it's worth their while to fix you up and send you back for round two.

At that point, though, you're an investment, and in all likelihood a cyborg. That arm you lost last time has been replaced with a tough but utilitarian chunk of steel. If your owners are feeling particularly generous, you may have a small-caliber weapon attached to the end of it, or a taser, or a flame thrower. Your legs can be modified to fly or, if the rules prohibit such freedoms for this round, refitted to provide a meters-long bounce in your step. The more you win, the more money they pump into you, and the more powerful you -- and your enemies -- become.

If you want to know how the game works, you need look no further than the [Action! System](#), available free at the [Gold Rush Games](#) website. The whole thing was built to take advantage of those core rules. Characters have four basic attributes for their mind and body, and several formulae are given to get secondary stats like how fast you are or how many skill points you get. (You'll need to bring your own six-sided dice to the table.)

Most of the skills fall into fairly narrow confines; the name of the game is beat-down, so you'll learn weapons and fighting before anything else. Rules for jumping, climbing, or otherwise traversing the arena, as well as how to hurt people on your way by, form the workmanlike entrée of the rules. Your dessert -- the crunchy bits you came for -- includes all the gear you get to play with. Devices for seeing in the dark, lung improvements, even cyber-hair that obeys your commands, make you less human but more bankable. Just like the aliens who took you, you're not limited to humans as competitors. The reptilian Tuara get bonuses to their Toughness and have their own poisoned-fang attack, and the feline Kisa can see in low light to rend you with their claws. Should anyone live long enough, they become the galactic champion and retire.

Beyond that, the rules of the game are literally that -- the rules for the Dzerini's brand of combat. One fight may happen in a lava field, the next on a spiked dais. Some weapons may be allowed, others prohibited, or you may have to fight for what few arms are left scattered about for the participants. They have their own "leagues," depending on how

much cash has been spent on your upgrades. A stable of starting characters lets you select a couple and jump right into each other's face, or you can butcher your own. Character sheets, scoreboards, and even a page for mapping out your stadium fill out the back of the book.

The artwork all by itself is worth the cover price. Why Richard Cox (or is it Bart Willard? The pieces are unsigned) isn't the talk of the game-art town is strange. With smooth lines and heavy detail in pieces that speak to action without *technically* leaving the page, this omission is either an oversight or an outright crime, depending on which way you look at it. Bryce Nakagawa also serves, illustrating the classy cardboard standup sheet of cutout figures you can use to make your own tabletop warriors.

This isn't a roleplaying game as much as a combat training manual that uses similar rules, but if you can read this volume and don't find yourself swamped with the RPG possibilities, you've probably got the right cover wrapped around the wrong interior text. It's a rich buffet from which to choose your weapons, and designing the arenas is almost as much fun as the characters. It all fits into just about any ongoing campaign, and ditching their system for your own is easy -- the two types of material are kept separate, so you can steal the ideas you want and round-file the ones you don't (there won't be many of the latter).

The concept is as old as the hills, and they have a pretty narrow arena in which they work their magic, but within those restraints Firefly Games expounds on just about anything you can think of that brings the subgenre alive. *CyborGladiators* is like a really entertaining laundry list of what makes this sort of visceral pastime such a perennial favorite in fiction, and that may make it a mainstay on your shelf as well.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Serenity Role Playing Game

Published by [Margaret Weis Productions](#)

Written by Jamie Chamber with James Davenport, Tracy Hickman, Tony Lee, Andrew Peregrine, Nathaniel C.J.S. Rockwood, Lester Smith, Christopher Thrash, James M. Ward, & Margaret Weis

Fiction by Margaret Weis

Illustrated by Lindsay Archer, Dan Bryce, & Ryan Wolfe

Cover by 11TH HOUR

226-Page Full Color Hardback; $39.99

What is probably one of the biggest licenses in recent years has arrived, fuelled by a firm fan favorite television series and by the buzz of its big budget movie sequel (recently released on DVD). The former is *Firefly,* what Joss Whedon did after *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel,* cancelled just after just a few episodes; and the latter, is *Serenity.* It is this movie that the ***Serenity Role Playing Game,*** published by Margaret Weis Productions, is based upon, allowing gamers to play in the 'Verse.

This is the setting for the new Science Fiction RPG, one that is more horse opera than space opera. Indeed the setting is *sans* aliens, blasters, and noisy ships in space, or the Black as it is known; and in tone and feeling owes much to the Wild West after the American Civil War. In the 'Verse, its equivalent was the Unification War that ended seven years ago in 2511. Fought between the Alliance Government of the central worlds and the Independents of the Rim worlds, the Alliance Government won and continues its efforts to bring the planets and moons of the frontier under its control. Despite their losing, there are still men of the Independent forces, known as Browncoats for the long dusters they wear, that prefer to live free of the Alliance. In the television series and film, one such man is Captain Malcolm "Mal" Reynolds, owner of *Serenity,* a *Firefly*-class transport. He and his crew fly the Black, taking on jobs both legitimate and illegitimate in order to make ends meet. This is also the default set-up for the RPG, in which the player characters crew a ship and fly the Black, bringing with them a panoply of backgrounds, connections, and secrets; all to be explored during the course of a game.

The RPG comes as a sturdy hardback, the contents decently laid out in full color, and illustrated with stills taken from the movie. It also comes with quite a few problems, all of them omissions. There is no character sheet, its stead taken by an advertisement for another game. There is no index, surely a cardinal sin in this day and age of modern RPG productions; and if I found it difficult to locate various facts for the purposes of this review, what then of trying to use the book during play? While there are plenty of character examples, there is no example of character generation. Likewise, there is no fully worked example of combat -- personal, vehicular, or between spaceships; or even a fully worked example of actual play. None of which are particularly complex, but for a game that is pitched at *Firefly* fans that want to try the game (as well as the fans that already game), they are all serious hindrances in their trying to understand and play the game.

Another potential problem is that the ***Serenity Role Playing Game*** is based solely upon the film of the same name, and

not on the television series, *Firefly.* Actually, this is not really a problem, as the book mentions some characters from the series by name, and gives the statistics for others by type rather than by name, in particular, Badger and Saffron. Also missing are character statistics for the character River Tam, as she is depicted in the film. This is done -- and they tell you this -- for purposes of game balance. This is understandable, but why not give them later in the GM's section for completeness' sake? Also missing is a starting scenario, something that experienced gamer will have no problem with, but a neophyte will.

Now some of these problems -- in particular, the character sheet and the scenario -- will be addressed with a QuickStart Rules download available from the website. Yet, at the time of writing, months after the game's launch at Gen Con, there is no sign of this material on the website.

With the bad points out of the way, what of the good? Well, the main cast get full write-ups; there is plenty of information about the 'Verse; there are spaceships galore, many with full-color (and very pretty) deck plans; and then there is the appendix. Not just a guide to the 'Verse's language and idiom, it also gives you all of the phrases and curses in Mandarin you will ever need. Which is, as they say, shiny. (Of course, the translation of these phrases and curses is toned down here, but a web search will reveal them all in their gorram glory.)

Characters are themselves created from a pool of points (determined by a campaign's Heroic Level) which are used to buy dice by type, one for each of the six attributes. The dice types include the d2, d4, d6, d8, d10, and d12; and the bigger the die type, the better it is. In addition to attribute dice, a player purchases Traits, either Assets or Complications. These include Allure, Mean Left Hook, and Religiousity; and Easy Mark, Leaky Brainpan, and Things Don't Go Smooth. Many come as Minor and Major, the latter requiring activation with Plot Points. Skills are purchased from a separate and larger pool of points, and are also rated by die type. They have a limit of d6, after which a character specializes with a higher type. Thus a character can have a Guns skill of d6, but a Pistol skill of d10.

Mechanically, the game is simple. Roll attribute plus skill dice to beat a target, the average target being seven. Attribute checks involve rolling two dice of the appropriate type; and an unskilled check is made against a single attribute die only. Dice do not explode, but bonuses and penalties for an action increase or decrease its die type.

Combat uses the same mechanics, rolled against a target or an opposed roll. Better rolls give bonuses to basic damage inflicted, with weapons inflicting Stun or Wound damage. Weaponry listed in the equipment section is generic, with bigger weapons possessing larger die types. Except for a couple of weapons given in the cast write-ups, including "Vera," no weapon is named, which is a pity as brand naming would have added flavor. Vehicular and spaceship combat works in the same fashion but on a larger scale. Again no record sheets are provided for either.

Conversely, spaceships do get named, including the *Firefly*-class transport. Others listed include passenger liners, colony ships (the equivalent of settler wagons), plus Alliance Cruisers and Gunboats, many accompanied by gorgeous deck plans. The spaceship design rules are nicely done, each vessel being treated just like a character. There is no starting point limit, but the more points spent on a ship, the higher the maintenance costs for the ship during play. Unlike character generation, there *is* a fully worked example of ship creation.

Game play emphasizes the use of Plot Points, with which a character begins with six. They are expended to improve an action die by type, to keep a character alive, manipulate the story in small ways, and to activate a character's major assets. In turn, they are gained for good play, achieving character goals and playing to their Complications. Only six can be kept between game sessions, the remainder becoming Advancement Points. Overall, the mechanics are light and quick, much like the other Joss Whedon derived RPGs, but with its multiple dice use harking back to both the [*Deadlands*](#) and [*Savage Worlds*](#) RPGs.

The game comes with a decent amount of background, the most complex of which is the setting's economics and exchange rate. Besides this, there is a reasonable amount of generic equipment, descriptions of various organizations, planets, and moons, though the map of 'Verse is more pretty than practical. There is also a sample ship and its crew, owned by a high rolling gambler, which if used, lends itself to numerous adventure ideas, as does the description of 'Verse. There is also advice for the GM, which is hardly spectacular, but good enough if you are new to RPGs.

Certainly, there is a lot to like in the **Serenity Role Playing Game,** the simple system, the background, the spaceships

and the rules for constructing them, as well as the writing itself. This is done in a style appropriate to the 'Verse, and is both light and engaging. But the game is marred by its omissions, in particular by the lack of full examples and index that only serve to make the game feel underwritten -- at least in those places, because in others it is not. As to the lack of an adventure, inspiration can be found in almost any space opera science fiction RPG, whether **Traveller** (BITS' **101 . . .** series would be useful here), **Star Wars,** or **Star Trek**; all the GM has to do is a-Westernify the end result.

Yet despite the irritating omissions, the actual end result is really rather likeable. Certainly nothing particularly groundbreaking, it is successful in imparting a sense of time and place, as well as the feel of the 'Verse. The rules themselves are light enough to hang your game on without impinging upon play. Perhaps I am influenced by my like of both *Firefly* and *Serenity,* but the **Serenity Role Playing Game** is far from unplayable.

--Matthew Pook

My Road Seem Dark As Night: Robert Johnson

"I got to keep movin'
I've got to keep movin'
Blues fallin' down like hail
Blues fallin' down like hail . . .
And the days keeps on worryin' me
There's a hellhound on my trail."
-- Robert Johnson, "Hellhound On My Trail"

Robert Johnson was the greatest blues guitarist that ever lived. Little else about his life is certain, but it's certainly uncertain in interesting ways. His birthdate is unknown, although it's assumed to be May 8 of 1909, 1911, or 1912; his death date (August 16, 1938) is only known thanks to the discovery of his death certificate in 1970. The cause of death is listed only as "no doctor," and Johnson's grave, in a churchyard in Morgan City, Mississippi, is unmarked. Only two photographs survive of Johnson, and only 41 recordings of 29 songs. Even his name has blurred edges -- he was raised Robert Spencer, only taking the name "Robert Johnson" when he discovered his mother's affair with Noah Johnson. He claimed the middle name "Lonnie" (which evoked the older bluesman Lonnie Johnson to him) and went by "R.L." (or "Robert Dodds") to muddy the waters still further. (His actual middle name was Leroy, making him another of America's mystical kings, *les rois.*) No canonical record of Johnson's tour dates, or even of his residences, survives; he fathered a number of children by many women, not all of them recorded either. With the exception of copious reminiscences from his contemporaries, gathered decades after the fact, less is known of Robert Johnson than of William Shakespeare. And like Shakespeare, the source of Robert Johnson's genius remains -- you guessed it -- unknown.

"Early this mornin'
When you knocked upon my door
Early this mornin', ooh
When you knocked upon my door
And I said 'Hello, Satan,
I believe it's time to go.'"
-- Robert Johnson, "Me and the Devil Blues"

The version of the story that most people have heard is that Robert Johnson sold his soul to the Devil at the crossroads of Highway 49 and Highway 61 in Clarksdale, Mississippi some time in 1931. Before that date, bluesman Son House recalled Johnson as a personable, but annoying kid trying to play guitar -- badly. He was, if anything, a harmonica player, and a pretty good one. Six months to a year later, by House's later recollection, Johnson's guitar playing was transcendent -- "When he finished, all our mouths were standing open." For the next five years, Johnson toured all over the Delta country and elsewhere in the South. He remained cagy about his music, and would turn his back during some numbers to avoid revealing his best riffs; if the scrutiny got too intense, he'd walk off the stage in the middle of a set. In 1936 and 1937 he recorded 29 songs in two sessions in San Antonio and Dallas; his biggest hit on record was "Terraplane Blues." After his records, he toured even more widely, gigging in Chicago, Detroit, New York, and even Windsor, Ontario. Wherever he went, he could always charm his way into female companionship, which is quite possibly what killed him. In a juke joint outside Greenwood, Mississippi, the story has it that Johnson was overly friendly to the bartender's girl. The bartender got revenge by serving Johnson a half pint of whisky laced with strychnine, and he died three days later. After seven years, the Devil had called Johnson's note due.

"I can be as fascinated by occult musings as the next guy, but it is long past time for music journalists to get over the cliche of always linking Robert Johnson and the Devil. For at least a few years, I propose a moratorium on sentences like 'Persistent themes in his blues were religious despair and pursuit by demons,' or 'Johnson seemed emotionally disturbed by the image of the Devil, the "Hellhound."' Such sentences tell us less about the realities of Johnson's music than about the romantic leanings of his later, urban white listeners."
-- Elijah Wald, *Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of Blues*

Unless Johnson died of syphilis, or of even less diabolical pneumonia, that is. Although other bluesmen such as Tommy Johnson and Peetie Wheatstraw did indeed claim to have learned guitar "at the crossroads" (Wheatstraw even called himself "the Devil's son-in-law"), the story of Robert Johnson's deal with the Devil comes from a single Son House interview in 1965 and from the earnest mythmaking of a *Rolling Stone* reporter in 1979. Son House was not above embellishing a story (or above pranking stuffy white ethnomusicologists), and it's more likely that Tommy Johnson's authentic Devil tale (which the Coen brothers include in the movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*) simply migrated to the far better known (but unrelated) Robert Johnson. Only two or three of his songs reference anything infernal ("Preaching Blues" is subtitled "Up Jumped the Devil" but has no demonic content), compared to the nine or 10 that focus on traveling or women, both well-documented Robert Johnson passions. "Cross Road Blues," for example, is a lot easier to read as a song about hitch-hiking unsuccessfully (possibly as a metaphor for alienation, possibly as a metaphor for trying to pick up women, or just possibly as a metaphor for hitch-hiking) than about diabolical contracts in Clarksdale.

"One individual, who appeared to me of a sallow complexion, melancholy air, and bright eye, affirmed that he . . . had distinctly seen, while I was playing the variations, the Devil at my elbow, directing my arm and guiding my bow."
-- Nicolo Paganini, letter published in the *Revue Musicale* (1831)

And it's not only Johnson's contemporary bluesmen, or their rock successors, who get tagged as diabolically trained. The tale of "the Devil's musician" predates the Devil's music by at least three centuries, with one Anthony Wood in 1658 describing a music professor's amazement that the virtuoso Thomas Baltzar had no hooves. This may stem from the motif of Death playing a fiddle in the Renaissance "Dance of Death" imagery, the *danse macabre* celebrated by such composers as Saint-Saëns and Liszt. Liszt, like Tommy Johnson at least, was widely considered to have sold his soul to the Devil for musical genius; to seal the deal, as it were, Liszt composed not only a Faust Symphony but four Mephisto Waltzes. Even closer to our theme, the violinist Giuseppe Tartini composed a "Devil's Sonata" in 1713 after dreaming that the Devil had given him a violin. But the ultimate "demon violinist" of the classical era was Nicolo Paganini. Unlike Johnson, Paganini demonstrated his talent early -- at thirteen, he was rejected as a student by the famous violinist Rolla, who claimed he could teach Paganini nothing. Paganini began touring Italy in a black coach driven by black horses. He composed a series of variations on a Sussmayr ballet, which he called *"Le Streghe,"* or "The Witches' Variations." Like Johnson, Paganini died in mysterious circumstances -- he refused to take the sacraments before his death, and so could not be buried in consecrated ground.

"If you want to learn how to make songs yourself, you take your guitar and your go to where the road crosses that way, where a crossroads is. Get there be sure to get there just a little 'fore 12:00 that night so you know you'll be there. You have your guitar and be playing a piece there by yourself . . . A big black man will walk up there and take your guitar and he'll tune it. And then he'll play a piece and hand it back to you. That's the way I learned to play anything I want."
-- Tommy Johnson, as quoted by his brother LeDell

And where did we bury [the unconsecrated dead](), back in Paganini's time and before? Why, as it turns out, at the crossroads. The crossroads is a classic "liminal space," a boundary of no-place where the normal rules don't apply. It's outside of town in the wild, which is creepy enough in ancient Greece and Depression-era Mississippi alike. The addition of a second road opens it out still further. Anyone (or anything) could come down either road from any direction; it's a focal point for chaos, which if you think about it is yet another contradictory notion. It's a [mirror]() of two roads, or a fork of three; it thus evokes choice and fate and chance both geometrically and symbolically.

The gods associated with the crossroads are therefore also often gods of fate and chance, of choices that determine lives. Hermes -- whose name seemingly comes from the word for "roadside cairn" -- was thus the god of gamblers. Such gods often extend their sway into the land of the dead, a natural extension of the concept of crossroads as boundary between worlds. Odin was "chooser of the slain," while Hermes was a psychopomp, a guide to the dead. A Mayan underworld god, Lord Maam, is depicted on a throne at a crossroads, and the goddess Hecate, queen of death and magic, was worshiped at the crossroads as Hecate Trioditis, Hecate Going-Three-Ways. (The connection between Hecate and Johnson's blues "Little Queen of Spades" about "a gamblin' woman" with a "mojo" is left for the student.) Hermes of the crossroad was Hermes Trikephalos, the Three-Headed, or Hermes Looks-Three-Ways. The Voudun loa Legba, the Opener of the Way, has a [Petro]() reflection known as Maitre-Carrefour, the Master of the Crossroads. He

knows the secrets of the dead and teaches necromancy, just as Legba opens the way to the other loa. Legba must be invoked before any Voudun ceremony; the African-American version of Voudun, hoodoo (more a magic than a religion) likewise requires many of its rituals to be done at the crossroads, rituals including dickering with the Devil (or "the black man" or "the rider") for knowledge and skill. Interestingly, the crossroads is also the place hoodoo conjurors dispose of dangerous used magical ingredients like candle wax, footprint dust, or incense ashes. The rituals of the Roman feast Compitalia, the offering to the Lares Compitales or "spirits of the crossroads," could only be performed by slaves, a reversal of normal priestly practice. Hermes killed Argus, the Hundred-Eyed watcher, at the crossroads to cover up Zeus' adultery, a disposal of a monstrous Titan in the service of illicit acts. The crossroads is not just a source of knowledge, but of dissonance and disturbance.

"There in the narrow hall, outside the bolted door with the covered keyhole, I often heard sounds which filled me with an indefinable dread -- the dread of vague wonder and brooding mystery. It was not that the sounds were hideous, for they were not; but that they held vibrations suggesting nothing on this globe of earth, and that at certain intervals they assumed a symphonic quality which I could hardly conceive as produced by one player."
-- H.P. Lovecraft, "The Music of Erich Zann"

Which is as good a time as any to mention the "Devil's interval," also called the "diabolus in musica" by medieval composers. This dissonant interval (called a tritone, because it spans three tones) was frowned upon (and perhaps even banned) in church music before the advent of equal temperament tuning. With Bach and the "well-tempered clavier" -- interestingly appearing right around the time of Tartini's dream of the Devil's wondrously tuned violin -- the Devil's interval could be modulated more pleasingly. (You can hear it in "Enter Sandman" by Metallica, in most of *West Side Story,* and in the opening vocal bars of "The Simpsons" theme -- "The/Sim-" -- by Danny Elfman.) My musicological mojo is nowhere near good enough to explain it any further, but I did note that one major tritone is the "diminished fifth." If, as Wikipedia seems to think, this is the same as a "flattened fifth," then it's the same as the "blue note" -- a key element of the "blues scale," which is to say, then, that the music Robert Johnson played better than anyone was tuned to the Devil's interval.

"Standin' at the crossroad, baby
Risin' sun goin' down
Standin' at the crossroad, baby
Risin' sun goin' down
I believe to my soul, now
Po' Bob is sinkin' down."
-- Robert Johnson, "Cross Road Blues"

Which leads, somewhat circuitously, to the notion beloved of the locals in Rosedale, Mississippi, that Robert Johnson made his famous deal at *their* crossroads, at the intersection of Highways 8 and 1, which would be a crossroads of an octave. But what if, mirror-wise, we've got it backwards? What if Johnson, raised with no name and no picture, was intended to be -- fated to be -- the avatar of the Devil, of the Master of the Crossroads, of Maitre-Carrefour. But then he loses his bride Virginia and their unborn child in 1930. That's the last straw for the easygoing harmonica player. He doesn't fold, he rebels. He practices guitar in graveyards for seven months with the bluesman Ike Zinnerman -- a mysterious figure in his own right, perhaps a Legba called to thwart Maitre-Carrefour. Then, on the night of the Compitalia, Johnson comes to the crossroads of the octave outside Rosedale. He sees "the blues walkin' like a man," as he says in "Preaching Blues (Up Jumped the Devil)", dissonance and death incarnate. But Johnson reverses Paganini and traps the Devil in his own interval, in the spaces between his notes. Before the "deal," Johnson had a slight cataract in one eye, which we will note as the stigmata of Odin. After the deal, his eye clears up -- he doesn't trade an eye for knowledge, but rather the opposite. He's beaten Hermes -- inventor of the lyre, after all -- at his own game.

But like all such victories, it's a chancy, partial one. He has to start travelling constantly; perhaps Hecate's (three-headed?) hellhound is on his trail. As he says in "Drunken Hearted Man," he's "been dogged and I been driven/eve' since I left my mother's home." Perhaps he picked up a lamia, a Dark Lady at the crossroads -- where one buries vampires -- and she weakens him even as she feeds him inspiration. Again "Preaching Blues" gives us a hint; "blues is a low-down achin' heart disease/Like consumption/killin' me by degrees" -- recalling our tubercular vampire spirits from Lovecraft country. In San Antonio as late as 1936, he thinks he might be able to escape her -- "I Believe I'll Dust

My Broom" and "Rambling on My Mind" both deal with abandoning a cruel lover -- and he sees "Sweet Home Chicago" on the horizon. On his tours he stops playing blues exclusively, but rather mixes in jazz and even Bing Crosby. But as he closes in on midsummer 1937, he's less sanguine. In Dallas, he records not just "Little Queen of Spades" and "Hellhound On My Trail" but "Stones In My Passway." In that blues, Johnson says "my road seem dark as night . . . my enemies have betrayed me/have overtaken poor Bob at last." And, in a creepy echo of Hermes of the roadside cairn, Johnson knows his enemies "have stones all in my pass." In "Traveling Riverside Blues," also recorded in 1937, he knows Hecate "got a mortgage on my body, now, and a lien on my soul." Perhaps he plans a rematch: "Lord, I'm goin' to Rosedale, gon' take my rider by my side." (Odin, the Rider God of the River?) But it's too late. On Hecate's feast day, August 13, he drinks strychnine in a roadhouse outside Greenwood -- at a juke joint known as the Three Forks.

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

All Downtime, All The Time

As folks who've been with us for the past 14 days know, my past [two columns](#) were about establishing a change of scenery in places where it may not be obvious to do so (such as in a legal thriller). Of course, such thoughts seldom fail to conjure ideas that are not 100% antithetical to the idea at hand. Fortunately, I'm able to recycle these irreconcilable notions in future columns, secure in the knowledge that most of you will forget any earlier incongruities.

Unless, of course, I make a point of bringing it up as my introductory paragraph.

<ahem> Anyway, the high concept -- one which I haven't been able to wrap my mind around fully -- is this: What if you had a campaign that was nothing but downtime?

I've discussed before about how [downtime](#) can often be one of the most enjoyable parts of an RPG campaign. And in a lot of stories (especially serial television shows) it's not the main courtroom-type drama that's where the action is; it's in the between-plot plot . . . such as *Ally McBeal.* (And with this -- my third-week-in-a-row *Ally McBeal* reference -- I have now accomplished the coveted *Ally McBeal* hat trick.) Couple this fact with my relative ho-hum-ed-ness toward [combat](#) in a lot of campaigns, and I can't help but envision a campaign that forwent the usual structure of "setup:adventure:downtime" and instead focused as much as possible on the latter.

To a certain extent this has been done before in some media. For example, the comic book series *Young Heroes In Love* was conceived as a *Melrose Place* of superheroes, where the main thrust (no pun intended) of the action was on the interpersonal relationships -- with an eye toward prime-time-soap-opera-type romance and sheet-romping. ("Oh, no! My powers are based on fire . . . why am I so attracted to the one whose abilities are based on *ice?!*") And, arguably, the TV show *E.R.* was one of the first to focus on the interpersonal relationships of the staff of the hospital more than on their patients.

Of course, this idea has a number of problems right out of the gate. First, it's the "in between" adventuring-type stuff -- the dungeon-crawling, the city-saving, the whatever -- that most often provides the grist for these downtime campaigns. ("Gee, I haven't been able to forgive you for leaving us to die while you went off to explore that interesting-looking corridor . . .") Second, without the downtime material filling in for "real" adventuring, but instead becoming the main course, it can be difficult to envision how such story hooks would originate.

So that's why I haven't been able to wrap my mind around the idea entirely. However, there are a few other observations I'd like to offer here, branching off from this main -- probably unworkable -- idea:

1) What if you had two GMs running a campaign, one who really likes running combat and "meat & potatoes"-style adventures, and one who likes the fluffier downtime stuff? Well, then, you have a potentially perfect combination to hand off the campaign back and forth! One GM can set up the adventure and act as the liaison to the plot-type adventures, and then -- once everyone is back home and falling back on their own machinations -- the campaign can be handed off to the subplot GM, who's free to serve as the tour guide through the downtime realms. Even better, neither GM will have reason to get bored or burned out, since the campaign will get passed around akin to an ant farm shaken like an Etch-a-Sketch. (For ideas on cooperative GMing, I recommend Robin Laws' **Rune RPG.**)

2) What if you have a group that's primarily interested in downtime, but the group (including the GM) can't get past the need for the plotted adventures to stir the pot? Well, then, what if those portions of the campaign are handled by a different game -- say, a **Mage Knight: Dungeon, HeroClix,** or **When Darkness Falls?** For a truly quasi-structured, quasi-narrative game, the group might try a game such as **Once Upon a Time.** Obviously, this introduces problems such as how do characters translate over between the two games (if the "real" RPG characters even *have* stats); this will probably also make the campaign feel not entirely unlike a *[Baby Pac-Man](#)* machine. Still, if everyone has a non-RPG game they really like and can envision it as the catalyst for downtime adventures, then it could serve as an interesting experiment.

3) As a final possibility, what if the GM and players abstract what those "real" adventures would be? The GM could

sketch out vague, broad plots and let the players draw them from a deck; for example, cards might say, "You must either betray another character or accuse another of betraying you," or "Your family or loved ones are placing a complication on your adventures, OR they are encouraging your adventures in an unexpected way." (As an aside, see how there were a couple of options on each of those sample cards? That way there's more flexibility for the players and less feeling like they drew the *CERTAIN DOOOOOM!* card.)

As an alternative on this idea, players could use their "experience points" (or whatever they would be called in this type of game) to bid on the vague notions of the card. For example, the GM might say, "What am I offered for this family-based subplot?" or "Who has an interest in a political subplot?"

Regardless of how these proto-plot cards were acquired, it would be up to the group to decide how this arrangement would work. One idea is for the player to run the vague sketch of an idea by the GM first for approval; another is allowing the players simply to start talking about the plot, akin to *Once Upon a Time.* ("Oh, did I mention to everyone? My mother's coming over. We need to give her a good impression of the organization; she wants me to quit and go back to NASA.") In this case, the players might want to have a means of "voting off" plot threads or changes that are too disruptive; perhaps each player can veto a certain number of plots, or perhaps the group can have an up-or-down vote if the need arises.

The all-downtime campaign is, as I said, at best a half-popped idea at this point. However, it combines some of the more interesting aspects of freeform roleplaying with the structure of more "classical" campaigns, while tossing something new into the mix. (What would a *Dungeons & Dragons* campaign that was all taverns and traveling scenes look like?) And perhaps the idea will fully pop for one of you all. If so, let me know; I'll bring popcorn.

--Steven Marsh

Designer's Notes: *GURPS Powers*

by Sean Punch

When I set out to write **GURPS Powers,** I realized that I had a daunting task before me: provide guidelines for creating almost every superhuman ability from nearly every genre that features such abilities (which, when it comes to RPGs, means *most* genres). Given that I had a finite number of pages to play with, I had to make a few hard choices before I even sat down at the keyboard:

- The book would only cover "built-in" abilities, not "add-ons" such as magic items, power armor, and super-gadgets -- most of which would simply be abilities from the **Basic Set** and **Powers** modified with gadget limitations (pp. B116-117).
- The book would emphasize "active" abilities that let the user *do* something (like shoot energy blasts or fly around) over "passive" abilities that just sit there (like tough skin or being a giant).
- The book would focus on advantages and largely omit attributes (even *super*-attributes, such as super-strength), disadvantages (however exotic), and skills (ditto!).

"That should make things simpler," I thought. Oh, how wrong I was!

First, I wrote too much. Then, when I got to the playtest -- and it was a *great* playtest -- I discovered that I had also omitted too much. I added whatever I could get away with while making almost no cuts . . . despite the pressing need for them. Fortunately for me and my readers, editor Andrew Hackard was able to trim enough excess verbiage that everything could stay. Let the public record show that I owe this man a beer.

The upshot was that there were relatively few outtakes. However, the playtesters proposed a lot of great ideas that I simply couldn't act on -- either because the proposals were very involved and would take up too much room or because I had already included something that was *just* similar enough that I couldn't justify the overlap. As such, I'd like to dedicate the rest of this article to the playtesters. Almost everything here was proposed by them, except for the occasional shred from my first draft. I'm not going to single out anyone for credit, because most of the items below were group efforts.

One last thing: all of these items come with a warning! If we realized that something wouldn't fit, we didn't spend a lot of time playtesting it . . . which means that everything here needs tinkering and tweaking to make it work. With a little experimentation, though, you should find at least a few ideas that are useful for your games.

Chapter 1 -- Building Powers

Most of the discussion focused on Chapter 2, but we had a few oddball ideas for Chapter 1. Two of these concerned power modifiers.

Technological Powers

In a few settings, technology -- implants, nanotech, and so on -- is as valid a power source as magic or psionics, making "Technological" a reasonable modifier. As *Gadget Limitations and Powers* (p. 107) suggests, unrealistic and largely unexplained technology should simply rename the Super power modifier "Superscience" for this purpose and keep both its effects and its -10% value. More realistic technological intervention that stresses the user's system might use Biological under a new name; that, too, would be worth -10%.

However, in some settings it's valid to treat a whole array of cybernetic implants as a power and

allow the possessor to grow more adept at using his artificial parts by buying a Talent. Simply use some of the modifiers suggested for *Cybernetics* (p. B46) as the power modifier. A typical power might consist of abilities that require weekly maintenance by the user. That's like Temporary Disadvantage, Maintenance (1 person; Weekly) [-5], making this a -5% power modifier. This *can* ultimately return more points than the Maintenance disadvantage because the effort required is *per ability*. A hero with 20 abilities must spend 20 hours/week with his tool kit! Most macroscopic implants are also subject to technological countermeasures that can detect them (such as X-ray scans) and interfere with them (EMP, jamming, etc.); that's worth -5% more. The total modifier comes to -10%.

Beneficial Modifiers

Most power modifiers are limitations, but it's valid for a power modifier to include a small enhancement -- or even be an enhancement overall -- if the power is *more* capable under certain conditions: in high-mana areas, when the stars are right, etc. Decide on the effects in terms of one or more general enhancements, and then reduce the enhancement value to 80% normal if the benefits are Very Common, 60% normal if Common, 40% normal if Occasional, or 20% normal if Rare.

The most likely enhancement is a conditional Reliable modifier (p. 109), which is worth a base +5% per +1 to use the ability. This becomes +4% for Very Common, +3% for Common, +2% for Occasional, or +1% for Rare.

Another common option is a reduction to the FP cost to use the power's abilities under the right conditions. This lowers all FP expenditures for any reason: regular use, extra effort, stunts, and anything else the GM comes up with. This is conditional Reduced Fatigue Cost, which is a basic +20% per level, so FP reduction is +16%/level if Very Common, +12%/level if Common, +8%/level if Occasional, or +4%/level if Rare. Note that this is very powerful, because it allows the user to use extra effort *for free* in some situations.

The GM can mix and match, if only to get a round multiple of +5%. For instance, a Divine power might be at -1 FP cost and +6 to skill rolls on certain high holy days and in a few major temples -- which the GM deems Rare -- for a +10% power modifier.

A genuine outtake was a formal system for pricing Talents. Mostly, everyone agreed that it was too much work to use -- and the numbers didn't seem very universal. Still, a GM who's willing to sit down and assign numbers applicable to *his* campaign might find it useful.

Pricing Talents

Talent costs a flat 5 points per level. Those who enjoy extra detail might want to increase this cost for exceptionally broad Talents or reduce it for unusually narrow ones. To do so, use the optional rules below -- *not* enhancements and limitations! No modifier of any kind ever applies to the price of a Talent.

Scope

The GM may wish to charge more for a Talent if the associated power has unusually numerous, flexible, or potent abilities. Talent should rarely cost more than 10 points/level, and should never go beyond 15 points/level.

Optionally, the GM can rate a power's "Scope" numerically and use this number to find the cost of

its Talent. Determine Scope as follows:

1. Start with the number of distinct advantages the power offers as abilities.
2. Add 1 for each advantage that the buyer can purchase more than once, regardless of how often he can take it -- but only if each "copy" works differently. This normally means that the advantage has several sub-traits (e.g., Scanning Sense or Telecommunication) or a user-defined property (e.g., Detect or Resistant), or offers special modifiers that make each version of the base advantage a different trait from all the others (e.g., Affliction or Innate Attack).

   The following advantages count *if the power permits multiple versions:* Affliction, Binding, Detect, Enhanced Move, Innate Attack, Jumper, Obscure, Permeation, Protected Sense, Resistant, Scanning Sense, Shapeshifting, Telecommunication, and Terrain Adaptation.

3. Add 1 for each advantage that has an open-ended number of levels or that otherwise lets the user spend as many points as he wishes. Add this only once per distinct advantage, no matter how many versions are available.

   Certain reasonably common abilities *always* qualify, unless the power specifies a cap: Affliction, Binding, Chameleon, Damage Resistance, Dominance, Enhanced Move, Growth, Innate Attack, Metabolism Control, Microscopic Vision, Mind Shield, Parabolic Hearing, Penetrating Vision, Shapeshifting, Shrinking, Silence, Stretching, Striking ST, Super Climbing, Super Jump, Telekinesis, Telescopic Vision, Temperature Control, Terror, and Wild Talent.

4. Add 1 for each advantage worth 50 points or more in its most basic form, before any modifiers. For traits that come in levels, consider only the price of the first level. For those that list "Variable" cost, use the minimum allowed outlay.

   Examples include Clairsentience, Insubstantiality, Jumper, Mana Enhancer, Mind Control, Morph, Neutralize, Possession, Shadow Form, Snatcher, Super Luck, and Warp.

Example: ESP power in the ***Basic Set*** has 12 abilities: Channeling, Clairsentience, Danger Sense, Detect, Medium, Oracle, Para-Radar, Penetrating Vision, Precognition, Psychometry, Racial Memory, and See Invisible. One of these abilities allows multiple versions (Detect), one is open-ended (Penetrating Vision), and one is worth 50+ points (Clairsentience). The Scope of ESP is therefore 12 + 1 + 1 + 1 = 15.

See the *Talent Cost Table* (below) for the effects of Scope on the price of Talent.

Variety

Most powers include abilities that require success rolls against two or more of DX, IQ, HT, Will, and Perception . . . and possibly other scores. But if a power's abilities only ever call for rolls against *one* score (or skills based on it), then its Talent represents a narrower bonus than usual and the GM may wish to reduce its cost to 80% normal, as indicated on the *Talent Cost Table.*

The GM can safely ignore this discount if he feels that it's splitting hairs. Few powers can claim it in any event! Nearly every advantage calls for the occasional roll against a score other than the one that usually governs it; for example, Warp calls for an IQ roll to activate but requires a DX-based Body Sense roll to avoid disorientation. In particular, if a power includes *any* ability that allows use of the optional rules in Chapter 4 for active defenses, extra effort, or stunts, it should *not* get a discount.

Talent Cost Table

The following table gives the point cost of Talent based on the Scope of the associated power and the variety of die rolls affected.

Scope of Power	Affects Any Score	Affects One Score
1-25	5 points/level	4 points/level
26-50	10 points/level	8 points/level
51+	15 points/level	12 points/level

This entire process is *optional.* It can be tedious to count up abilities, figure out which ones are multifaceted or exceptionally potent, and consider all the success rolls they might require! The GM is welcome to declare a cost of 5 points per level for *all* powers and be done with it.

Chapter 2 -- Building Abilities

We had a *lot* of ideas here! Most concerned specific advantages.

Allies: Some Helpful Advice

What ability do you give a character who can summon something -- say, animals or demons? Allies with the Summonable enhancement. What about someone who has no limits on what he can summon? Modular Abilities (Limited, Only Allies with Minion and Summonable, -50%). That's expensive, though, and most summoners have a more limited catalog. A more affordable option is to take a separate Allies advantage for each creature or group of identical creatures you can summon and then make them exclusive via *Alternative Abilities* (p. 11). For instance:

> Ally (Demon Lord; 150% power; 15 or less; Summonable, +100%)* [60]
> Allies (Gang of Imps; 25% power; ×10; 15 or less; Summonable, +100%)* [8]
> Ally (Demon Knight; 100% power; 15 or less; Summonable, +100%)* [6]
> Ally (Lesser Demon; 50% power; 15 or less; Summonable, +100%)* [3]
> * Alternative abilities; only one can be summoned at a time!

Another Alternative to Invisibility . . .

One option we had to cut from *Alternatives* for Invisibility was Affliction (Area Effect, +50%/level; Based on Will, +20%; Disadvantage, Delusion, "You can't see me," +15%; Emanation, -20%; Malediction 1, +100%). It's basically an alternative to Invisibility with the Glamour limitation (p. 111), for those who'd prefer a Quick Contest to an unopposed resistance roll.

. . . and One for Illusion

A fun alternative to the Illusion advantage is the "Cosmetic Ability" perk. It takes a turn to use and looks just like one specific ability, which the player can design in as much detail as he wishes. However, it's just a light-and-sound show -- a set-piece trick, not a controllable illusion. The GM should restrict such perks to those whose powers have a source or focus capable of explaining the necessary special effects. The Illusion power (p. 129) always qualifies!

Jumper as Time Stop

We eventually settled on Temporal Stasis (p. 118) as our time-stop ability, but there was a proposal to create a new variant of the Jumper advantage to let the user stop time for *himself:*

> *Jumper (Time Stop):* You can't travel through time, but you can jump *out of* time. Activate your ability normally. If it works, then you drop out of the normal flow of time. While out of time, you perceive the world as frozen. You can't affect it (and vice versa) -- only observe and move through it. You can interact with items you brought along, subject to the usual limits on carrying capacity; this lets you patch your wounds, reload your guns, read magical scrolls, and so forth. Time passes for you (you tire, grow hungry, age, etc.), but it's subjective. You can use your ability again to return to normal time at the instant you jumped. *100 points.*

Yet Another Special Enhancement for Leech

This modifier for Leech came out of the same discussion as the one for Neutralize (below):

> *Boosts Abilities:* Each HP you steal gives you a character point you can use to heal yourself or temporarily boost abilities. You store these points in a "battery" with a capacity of two points per level of Leech. Once this is full, you can still drain HP but gain no points. On your turn, you can take a Ready maneuver to drain this battery to heal yourself permanently: 1 point repairs 1 point of crippled abilities, 2 points heal 1 HP, and 3 points restore 1 FP. You can also spend stored points to improve abilities (anything but skills) temporarily. You can't reallocate points once used. Points drain away at the rate of one per second, unused ones first. You lose enhanced abilities as the points drain away. This modifier is incompatible with all other special modifiers. +100% if you can only heal or enhance one power, set at character creation; +200% if you can use the points freely.

The +100% version is probably overpriced, but the +200% version seems useful.

Thoughts on Modular Abilities

There's a little system for creating new forms of Modular Abilities on p. 63. I wanted to present the various cases in the ***Basic Set*** and ***Powers*** as illustrative examples, but there was no space for it. Here they are:

- *Computer Brain.* Per slot: 6 points ("all the software on the net" is just about unlimited). Per point: 4 points (downloading is fast and hackers won't pay a cent, so external interference -- network conditions -- is the sole limit).
- *Chip Slots.* Per slot: 5 points ("all software burned onto ROMs" is a huge category, but smaller than the one above). Per point: 3 points (swapping out is fast, but chips are expensive *and* can be yanked out).
- *Divine Inspiration.* Per slot: 6 points ("anything my god allows" is close to unlimited). Per

point: 4 points (the prayers are free and fast, but a god has veto power).

- *Super-Memorization.* Per slot: 5 points ("any skill represented in a book" is more limited than "anything on the net," but still larger than a short list). Per point: 3 points (the only thing keeping this from being arduous and awful enough to rate 2 points is the unrealistically fast memorization time).

We also left out a radical proposal under *Alternatives:* "Wildcard Abilities." We didn't have time to explore it thoroughly, but the basic idea was to allow a hero to buy an advantage with an expensive form of the Cosmic enhancement -- worth at least +300%, maybe more -- that lets him use it as *any other advantage,* with several important caveats: the player would have to explain the emulated advantage as a feat performed with the enhanced advantage, the feat would require an attribute roll, and the point value of the emulated advantage couldn't exceed the point value of the basic, underlying advantage (or perhaps a multiple of this, if the enhancement value were very high).

For instance, Flight is 40 points, so Flight! might cost 160 points. It would permit the hero to do *anything* that's consistent with being amazingly adept at flying. A DX roll might let him push his speed beyond its usual limit (+40 points of Enhanced Move), use his amazing lift to move heavy objects around (+40 points of Lifting ST), or even suck things along in his vortex (+40 points of limited Telekinesis).

It would need tweaking for each campaign, but it definitely has potential!

A Variation on Power Theft for Neutralize

The following enhancement eventually became a variant of Power Theft, but some might find it useful on its own:

> *Power Boost:* You can use the powers you neutralize to boost your own. You receive a pool of temporary character points equal in value to the abilities you neutralize. On your turn, you can take a Ready maneuver and allocate these points to improve your own abilities (anything but skills) on a one-to-one basis. You don't have to "spend" all the points at once, but you can't reassign allocated points. Determine duration normally. You cannot use Neutralize at all until this time is up; then you lose your boosted abilities but may use Neutralize again. +100% if stolen points can only enhance one ability, set at character creation; +200% if they can improve one power; +300% if they can boost anything.

Disadvantageous Alternate Forms

If you uncontrollably assume a form that you have no control over, then the "Were-Creatures" solution on p. 74 -- an Alternate Form with Uncontrollable Trigger and Unconscious Only -- is a little unfair. The easiest fix is to treat such a form as a disadvantage, worth -5, -10, -15, or -20 points for Rare, Occasional, Common, or Very Common trigger conditions, respectively.

The point value of the form isn't important . . . unless the GM feels it is. Turning into something extremely vulnerable, like a clam, can be a problem. Becoming the Death God can be useful if you abuse it properly; just be sure you're on enemy territory when the trigger gets pulled. As such, the GM might wish to add a percentage of the point-value difference between the shapeshifter's base template and the shifted template to the above cost -- perhaps 5%, 10%, 15%, or 20% depending on rarity; perhaps more.

We didn't get to playtest this, so it's very experimental. Have fun!

We also had a few really wild thoughts on enhancements and limitations.

More Abuses for Cosmic

Everyone liked the idea of using the Cosmic enhancement to create mind-blasting divine abilities such as a god's voice (see *Powering Up* for Rapier Wit, p. 70) or appearance (see *New Special Enhancements* for Terror, p. 84), and to let Payload stow things outside of reality (see *Alternatives* for Snatcher, p. 76). There were many other suggested uses for Cosmic. Some are hidden in the examples in Chapter 3, but others didn't make it in. Here are just a few of these:

- Cosmic, +50% on Enhanced Move to allow acceleration to full speed in just one turn.
- Cosmic, +50% on both Enhanced Move and any underlying movement ability to gain complete maneuverability: turn on a dime, never make maneuver rolls, etc.
- Cosmic, +50% to be exempt from any one of the limiting rules in Chapter 4. For instance, it could eliminate the FP cost for *Abilities and Exertion* (p. 159).

Mega-Abilities

Beyond Cosmic, the GM might want to allow "mega-abilities" that use the *Size and Speed/Range Table* (p. B550) to calculate effect, as *Powers* does for Super-Speed (p. 42), Super-Effort (p. 58), and high levels of Injury Tolerance (Damage Reduction) (p. 118). It's hard to assign a fair price, but one possible mechanic is to charge a special enhancement -- perhaps as high as +400% -- on a trait that comes in levels and rule that this enables the user to perform greatly enhanced feats. At the cost of 1 FP per use (the GM decides what a "use" is), the user may look up the purchased level in the "Size" column of the table and find his effective level for that feat in the "Linear Measurement" column. So one level acts as three, 10 levels act as 100, 20 levels act as 5,000, and so on.

What kept this out of *Powers* was the amount of space it would take to give fair enhancement costs for all affected abilities and sufficient guidelines for FP cost. Altered Time Rate has no FP cost and needs only about +20% to be balanced, while Lifting Strength definitely needs its FP cost and +400% enhancement value. Who knows what's fair for other abilities? But the brave GM might want to play with it and find out.

Chapter 3 -- Examples

Dozens of proposed sample abilities and powers came and went during the playtest. Most of these have shown up on our [forums](#) since then. Rather than try to find them all, I'll just give two genuine outtakes.

Death Touch (+390%): Toxic Attack 2d+1 (Cosmic, Irresistible attack, +300%; Cosmic, Lingering special effect, +100%; Melee Attack, Reach C, Cannot Parry, -35%; Selective Effect, +20%; Variable, +5%) [49]. *Notes:* Injures a living target regardless of armor. Only supernatural healing can repair this injury; it doesn't heal naturally. Selective Effect lets the attacker "wither" body parts by touching and injuring a single hit location. *49 points.*

Reinforced Skeleton: DR 1 (Accessibility, Only to avoid broken bones, -80%) [1]. *Notes:* An armored skeleton. Only a single blow that breaks the skeleton can cripple a limb or extremity; accumulated injury won't suffice. This has no effect on HP loss or maximum possible injury, but subtracts 1 HP per level from wounds for crippling purposes. For instance, a hero with 13 HP and Reinforced Skeleton 5 needs 12 HP in a single blow to cripple his arm instead of the usual 7 HP -- but blows to his arm still injure him normally, and injury past 7 HP is still lost. This trait provides

no overall DR. *1 point/level.*

Chapter 4 -- Powers in Action

A new concept that snuck into *Powers* was the idea of abilities that let characters "spend" character points to create lasting or permanent changes in the game world -- in the spirit of *Player Guidance* (p. B347). For instance, Regrowth (p. 71) has a "Doubling" special enhancement that lets the possessor spend points on the fly to gain new body parts, Create (p. 92) has a "Creation Pool" mechanic that turns points into more-or-less stable matter, and there are even guidelines under *Wishes* (p. 119) for an ability that lets a godlike being grant advantages to others . . . if they have the points.

Some of the playtesters wanted other character point-powered abilities, but we didn't have time to get into it. Here's how such a thing might have looked.

Character Point-Powered Abilities

Some abilities that show up in fiction for narrative and dramatic purposes have the potential to wreck a game. One way to control them is to fuel them with a precious, limited resource: unspent character points. Because the cost to use them is so dear, of course, such abilities ought to be a lot cheaper.

Build a character point-powered ability normally, then divide its point cost by five. However, it normally does *nothing*. The player must spend character points for each use. The precise cost is up to the GM. He might require one point per use . . . or one point for a *dramatically appropriate* use and more for less-fitting uses . . . or even points equal to the cost of the ability (that is, 1/5 normal ability cost). Finding the costs that work best in a given campaign is definitely an exercise for the GM.

Caritas Sorcery

for *GURPS & In Nomine*

by William J. Keith

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was hungry, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.
--Matthew 25:34-36

From the humane swipe across the throat of an expensive bullock, to a chatty evening with a kidnapped virgin and an icepick, to a symbolic sacrifice of your God himself nailed up on a hill, many a proud and ancient religion has been founded on a good sacrifice. Blood-letting of one kind or another offers the devout a spiritual return on a physical investment of time and resources. *GURPS Fantasy* discusses the basic principle behind most historical beliefs about sacrificial magic: resources are ritually destroyed and thereby consumed by a spiritual agent which grants boons. However, sorcerers in Hermetic or *In Nomine*-style sorcerous traditions are notoriously independent-minded. They may prefer to alter the Universe themselves rather than give a middleman a cut. One of the basic principles of historical thaumaturgy may allow them to do just that.

Caritas Sorcery is described herein with standard *In Nomine* mechanics (a non-canonical *GURPS* conversion of the Sorcery rules can be found at http://www.sjgames.com/in-nomine/articles/new/Players/Resources/ginsorcery.html). It requires the usual prerequisites of any Sorcerer, as determined in standard or *GURPS In Nomine.* In any other fantasy setting, Caritas Sorcery would be a clerical-style magical system with a limited selection of subtle effects that mostly enhance the caster's abilities. In such settings, use the following *GURPS* mechanics:

At least one level of Power Investiture (Sorcery) and a Will of 12 are required. In most settings, the principles involved also assume that a practitioner is a corporeal being with physical needs such as food, rest, and the like. Use a core skill of Caritas Sorcery (M/VH), and default a ritual described as "Focus/n" to Caritas Sorcery-n as a Hard maneuver. Ritual skills cannot exceed the level of the core skill, and require a certain level of base knowledge: if the core skill Caritas Sorcery is known at less than level 12+n, a Focus/n ritual is performed at an penalty of -1 to skill. Where an Essence cost is listed, double this to find the Fatigue cost in a more typical magical setting.

Example: Transplant, a moderately difficult ritual, is listed as "Focus/3." If the sorcerer knows Caritas Sorcery at a level of 16, then the default for Transplant is 13, and can be bought up to 16 with 2 to 5 points like any Hard maneuver. If the core skill were only at 14, though, Transplant would default to 11 and could be bought up to a skill of 14 -- but would be *cast* at a -1 penalty.

Though limited and low-power in most such settings, Caritas Sorcery has one distinct advantage: self-initiation. A seeker need not have any potential as a standard mage, and Power Investiture (Sorcery) can be obtained without intervention by any pantheon or demonic powers.

In a world where Caritas Sorcery develops there is unlikely to be any region of anything other than normal sanctity for the tradition. (Players should discuss this assumption with the GM before purchasing the necessary traits, of course.) Thus, it makes an attractive path for someone to follow who desires supernatural abilities but lacks more common means to power, such as inborn Magery or the favor of a deity. Demonically-assisted magic, another option for persons in such straits, is considerably more powerful . . . but then, the moral risks of *that* are widely known, if sometimes foolishly disregarded.

Philosophy

Caritas Sorcery is a sacrificial tradition based on Hermetic principles rather than propitiatory ones. The core of any Caritas ritual is an act of physical sacrifice, but instead of resources being destroyed, they are released into the Symphony at large for the benefit of other people. This change in the Symphony is ritually harnessed to drive change in the sorcerer's own life, turning a benefit granted to others into a benefit gained oneself. This is based on the Hermetic principle that man reflects the Universe at large: as without, so within.

The only skill Caritas sorcerers learn in *In Nomine* is Focus, which is the basis for the standard rituals Sacrifice for Essence, Store Essence, and Symphonic Awakening. Interestingly, Focus is based on Precision, which means that high Will (beyond the 6 required to become a Sorcerer) is *not* of primary importance for Caritas sorcerers. Alchemy is much practiced by Caritas sorcerers, as well.

It may be that Caritas Sorcery represents an attempt by Heaven to alter the memetic basis of sorcery in a way that lessens Hell's grip on the practice. Certainly Caritas Sorcery finds sheer willfulness less useful than regular Sorcery. It also rewards asceticism and community spirit. On the other hand, some of its rituals are pagan or even blatantly infernal, and the sacrifices aren't always made by the sorcerer. Whether this represents a different source polluting the practice or a Heavenly attempt gone awry is entirely up to the GM.

Style

Style is very important for *In Nomine* Sorcerous traditions. GMs are encouraged to give bonuses to skill for appropriate settings and penalties for similarly disadvantageous conditions. Visually and aurally, the simplest Caritas rituals appear to be quiet prayers or mantras in a foreign language, combined with a few hand gestures vaguely reminiscent of blessings. Longer and more complicated rituals sometimes require that the sorcerer use his finger to trace certain eldritch symbols on a subject. Only Store Essence, Protective Ward, Permanent Ward, and The Last Gift require the obviously-occult trappings of a pentagram, circle, and other such paraphernalia.

Caritas Sorcery may be nearly unique among *In Nomine's* supernatural traditions in that it gains effectiveness among large crowds of strangers. Nearly every Caritas ritual involves at least one other person in its casting, and Caritas benefits from a sorcerer being in touch with the community of humanity. If the sorcerer does his casting completely alone, a -1 penalty to skill is reasonable; more if other people are very far away. If in the presence of at least one other person, skill is at base level; if the Caritas sorcerer can manage to quietly do his casting in close contact with ten or so others, a +1 bonus is called for, while interacting personally with a hundred people over the course of a casting is worth a +2 (assuming the sorcerer's concentration is not broken during the casting time!).

Asceticism is also valued by the tradition. Flashy jewelry, expensive cars, a fine meal eaten recently, and other such luxuries penalize skill at -1 *per item,* while casting in plain clothes in a simply furnished home after a nourishing meal is at base skill. A ritual performed while wearing clothes threadbare from use, in one's bare sleeping quarters, after fasting for a day, could be at as much as +3. The GM can weigh whether sundry mortifications of the flesh would also qualify for bonuses.

Caritas Rituals

One important characteristic of Caritas Sorcery is that would-be sorcerers can self-initiate. The Symphonic Awakening ritual grants the Advantage of Awareness, of a type suitable for the setting -- Symphonic Awareness in an *In Nomine* game. Once this is performed, or if Awareness is not required in the setting, the Sorcerous Initiation ritual grants the Caritas Sorcery Attunement (in *GURPS* settings, Power Investiture (Sorcery)). The sole exception is a *GURPS In Nomine* game, wherein Power Investiture (Sorcery) and Essence Control equal to 2/3 HT automatically come with Awareness. In such a case, the GM may simply rule that the character's Sorcery is inaccessible until the proper initiation is completed.

Standard Rituals

Symphonic Awakening (Focus/1): Symphonic Awakening is unlike the other rituals listed here. While it can be studied as a maneuver based on Caritas Sorcery with the mechanics described above, it can also be studied as its own separate Mental/Very Hard skill with no default, and can be performed without Power Investiture (Sorcery). Success awakens any setting-appropriate Awareness in the subject, who must meet all other requirements in the setting and have enough unspent points available. In *GURPS In Nomine,* Awareness must also come with Power Investiture (Sorcery) and Essence Control equal to 2/3 HT. (A subject without sufficient points may, at a GM's whim, gain the listed traits and sufficient mental Disadvantages to make up the difference, to simulate a mind-wracking awakening.)

Every Sorcerous tradition has its own details. The Caritas version of this ritual requires that the subject be undergoing a nightlong vigil; the subject will preferably have spent the week beforehand in absolute silence, doing no significant work except meditating upon the principles of the Art. This is not strictly required, but helps a non-Aware mundane reserve the necessary Essence when attempting to initiate himself.

Time: 1d hours
Essence: 7 - check digit (or degree of success), with a minimum of 2.

Sorcerous Initiation (None): as per *Corporeal Player's Guide.* There is no skill involved, merely a Will roll by someone who meets all the other requirements to become a Sorcerer. The Caritas version requires the would-be initiate to ritually sever an important life tie. Moving to a new city, quitting your old job or getting a divorce are generally agreed to suffice; killing an old enemy or giving away a substantial portion of one's earthly wealth also work. The seeker should make it personal; the GM is strongly encouraged to grant bonuses or penalties to the Will roll based on the act undertaken. In *GURPS In Nomine,* this ritual is unnecessary; Power Investiture (Sorcery) comes with Symphonic Awareness. In other settings, this ritual grants one level of Power Investiture (Caritas Sorcery). Whether more levels are obtainable with deeper initiations is entirely up to the GM, who is invited to consider what the higher ranks of such an art might entail.

Time: no standard casting time
Essence: 0

Sacrifice for Essence (Focus/2): This is where Caritas Sorcery begins seriously differing from the standard model. Caritas sorcerers have a large array of sacrificial rituals that obtain Essence not from destruction of living creatures or artifacts, but from the diffuse Essence of every Symphonic act. In this sense, they are very similar to Rites. Each takes 30 minutes to prepare and has an initial casting cost of 1 Essence. Among the many Sacrifice for Essence rituals Caritas sorcerers practice are:

- *Blood Sacrifice:* the sorcerer donates blood, encourages others to do the same, or assists in such a donation. The ritual's effect lasts hours equal to the CD, or the degree of success on the skill roll. Whenever blood donated under this ritual umbrella is later used medically, the Sorcerer gains 1 Essence per pint thus donated. While this Essence takes days or weeks to arrive and comes at a random time, a Caritas Sorcerer assisting in a modern blood drive can amass a significant potential Essence reserve from what has effectively become an assembly-line blood sacrifice operation. (Even simply donating himself can allow the Sorcerer to reap a small benefit: 1 pint of blood is often split and used for up to three patients.)
- *Heave!:* the Sorcerer volunteers manual labor, for which he must accept no payment, either in money or other favors. For every 2 hours of labor, he gains 1 Essence; thus, in an eight-hour day of work, the Sorcerer can net 3 Essence.

Other versions are available; GMs and players are encouraged to come up with suitable charitable acts.

Store Essence (Focus/3): as per *Corporeal Player's Guide.* Occasionally used by circles of Caritas sorcerers. In Fatigue-based settings, use the mechanics of Manastone.

Caritas Sorcery permits the use of the rituals Protective Ward and Permanent Ward. In non-*In Nomine* settings, use the mechanics of Astral Block and the enchanting of a permanent Astral Block, respectively. It also permits the making of a Spirit Anchor, which non-*In Nomine* settings should treat as a one-use Bind Spirit enchantment. It does *not* have a version of the standard ritual Siphon Essence! Such theft is antithetical to the underlying philosophy of the

tradition. For details of all these rituals, see the *Corporeal Player's Guide.*

New Rituals

The real strength of Caritas Sorcery is revealed in the array of rituals unique to the tradition that harness universal benefit to achieve personal strength. Performing these rituals requires that one be initiated as a Caritas sorcerer.

Tithing (Focus/1): the Sorcerer gives away 10 percent of his income over the last year, beyond any legally required taxes, to charities of which he does not expect to benefit. The effect of the ritual is to ensure that his assets, less his debts, will not cause his Wealth level to lower over the next year. Primarily, this means unexpected debts or lawsuits will not impact his finances severely; attempts to make huge purchases on credit will merely be declined, shady dealmakers will get nervous, and other attempted abuses will fail.

Time: 1 hour
Essence: 1

Zakat (Focus/1): If the Sorcerer is a faithful and observant Muslim, he can substitute zakat for tithing. This ritual requires instead payment of zakat to eligible persons; this is 2.5% of all assets above nisab -- the amount necessary for the Sorcerer, and any dependents, to maintain Status 1 for a year (Status 0 in *GURPS* settings) -- and assures the Sorcerer that his assets, less his debts, will not fall below nisab.

Time: 1 hour
Essence: 1

If local religion sets other traditional amounts, these can be used. In settings where such tithing or zakat *is* governmental taxation, the required payment is a similar voluntary contribution above this.

Excalibur's Scabbard (Focus/2): This ritual requires that at least a pint of blood be donated. If the casting is successful, then for the duration of the effect the donor does not bleed: he loses no HP due to the bleeding rules, the Hemophilia disadvantage is negated, no Essence is gained from sacrificing him, vampires find him tasteless and less filling, and any other effects the GM considers reasonable for the setting. (The donor still *has* blood; for example, blood agents still work.) The sorcerer can cast this ritual upon other donors (often bodyguards) as long as the caster is not the recipient of the blood. The effect lasts until the blood is replaced -- two months naturally for a human, though magical or high-tech healing may shorten this.

Time: 1 hour, which can be simultaneous with the donation process or prior
Essence: 1

Transplant (Focus/3): the Sorcerer ritually marks the body of a person preparing to donate an organ, who must be alive at the time. (The markings are visible only to Symphonic or other suitable Awareness.) If the organ is successfully donated thereafter, the Sorcerer's analogous organs gain great toughness: he may treat the next successful attack to the vitals as a simple hit to the torso, or if a cornea was donated an attack to the eye as a hit to the face. Multiple successes at this ritual add uses of the ability. A powerful version of this ritual (Focus/6) allows the Sorcerer himself to donate a kidney; upon successful transplant, the ritual takes permanent effect, as long as the sorcerer had the points available to pay for the No Vitals advantage.

Time: 30 minutes, or 1d hours for the greater
Essence: 2, or 6 for the greater

I Was Hungry, And Ye Gave Me Meat (Focus/3): In high traditional fashion, the sorcerer slaughters an animal, thereafter giving away the food to the poor. Technically, the slaughter is not required -- potable water is also useful to give away -- but the ritual is performed at a penalty if the sorcerer doesn't put his heart into it. He must have owned the comestibles, and have been in sight of them at least briefly; a short incantation over the goods is required. Performing this ritual reduces the sorcerer's needs for calories and water by as much as was given away. The sorcerer can

accumulate days of caloric and water needs over the course of several castings, to be stored and used when desired; in *GURPS In Nomine* or other *GURPS* settings, the sorcerer can accumulate up to HT days of satiation. In standard *In Nomine,* use (Corp. Forces × Strength). This ritual has the additional advantage of resisting Gluttony attunements, especially Consume -- powers which cause hunger, dehydration or starvation must "burn through" the sorcerer's stored satiety before affecting the sorcerer with any remainder.

Plenty of Caritas Sorcerers enjoy a good deer hunt -- one deer provides sufficient calories to max out the ritual's effectiveness for most Sorcerers. Others are too empathetic toward any form of life to enjoy such a thing, and find it more pleasant to give away overflowing cornucopias of fruits of the harvest.

Time: 1 minute
Essence: 1

Naked, And Ye Clothed Me (Focus/3): It's not that cold anyway . . . For each item of clothing ritually marked before being given away, a Caritas sorcerer can later summon a memory of such clothing at need. Effects are at the GM's discretion, but at a minimum should include Temperature Tolerance 10, resistance to sunstroke, and similar moderate environmental protections. If the Sorcerer springs for body armor to be sent to soldiers or policemen who need it, summoning equivalent DR as a Blocking maneuver is not unreasonable, either (roll against a skill the same as the original ritual). The clothing is merely an aura not visible to the eye, and effects generally last as long as the current situation requires -- hours for a jacket in a snowstorm, one bullet for a tac vest.

Time: 1 minute to mark, instant to resummon
Essence: 1 to mark, 1 to resummon later

I Was A Stranger, And Ye Took Me In (Focus/3): the Sorcerer houses someone who needs it; despite the name of the ritual, the recipient of the largesse does not have to be a stranger, merely someone honestly without a roof to call their own. For every night the Sorcerer so houses someone in need under the same roof, a successful casting provides the ability to skip one night of sleep without accumulating the mental effects of lost sleep. In standard *In Nomine,* up to Precision such days can be so accumulated; in *GURPS,* up to IQ.

Time: 1 hour
Essence: 1

I Was Sick, And Ye Visited Me (Focus/4): The sorcerer assists the sick as part of this ritual. The requirement is fairly broad; it is equally efficacious to work at an AIDS clinic or make chicken soup for an elderly shut-in with a fever. For each recipient of personal assistance, the sorcerer adds 1 to the target number of the next roll associated with disease, such as resisting initial infection, avoiding effects, or shaking it off. Alcoholism, drug addictions, and Songs of Pestilence are all possibilities beyond normal diseases. Bonuses may stack as high as the sorcerer cares to stockpile, at 1 Essence each, but all of them will be spent on the next necessary roll.

Time: 1 minute
Essence: 1

Between the lack of needs for food, water, shelter, and sleep, and near-immunity to disease that these four rituals grant, a human with all of these effects active simultaneously could very nearly pass as a celestial in a vessel -- an observation that has struck some Caritas Sorcerers and led to some intriguing lines of research.

I Was In Prison, And Ye Came Unto Me (Focus/5): This delicate ritual requires that the Sorcerer labor to expand the horizons of the imprisoned. In return, the sorcerer will not lack for aid when required -- in *GURPS* terms, the next attempt to employ a Contact, Favor, Ally, or Patron is guaranteed to make contact with the desired person. In standard *In Nomine* terms, a successful casting means the sorcerer can summon at will one manner of aid of a type rendered to a prisoner, appearing seemingly by coincidence. The return is proportional to the investment: a correspondence with a prisoner will ensure a Contact, a visit will requite a Favor, engaging in a teaching program for inmates guarantees an Ally, and actually seeing an innocent man freed or early parole granted promises a Patron. Equivalent means are usable, naturally, and can be "spent" on less labor-intensive advantages if desired. Only one assurance at a time can be

readied.

Time: 10 minutes
Essence: 3

A different version of this ritual requires that the sorcerer personally free the prisoner, regardless of innocence or guilt. This version of the ritual costs no Essence, instantly grants 1 Essence, and occasionally attracts the attention of a human Sorceress of great skill and power. She tends to be favorably disposed toward the Sorcerer and can teach many peculiar and useful rituals. She appears extremely rarely, though: roll 3d6. She appears on 17 or *more*; this number can be decreased one-for-one by spending additional Essence on the ritual, and at the GM's discretion by addressing her in the casting with promises of service. (Wise Sorcerers will note that, while she is verifiably a human, it is essentially a kind of critical failure which summons her; conclusions are left as an exercise for the thaumatologist.)

The Last Gift (Focus/6): the sorcerer gives his life that another may live. This working may take two forms: in the full ceremonial form, the sorcerer prepares the dead body of someone he wishes to raise, and commits ritual suicide. The soul of the deceased is drawn out of its current realm of existence (although souls cannot be removed from the Higher Heavens or Lower Hells); if the soul disbanded upon death, this effect fails. Any necrosis in the body is reversed, though not fungal infections, killing wounds, and the like; an assistant with appropriate healing Songs nearby is recommended. An alternate form, a brief prayer, can be employed if the sorcerer is dying after aiding someone in mortal danger. In either case, the various versions of this ritual guarantee that the sorcerer himself will become a dreamshade, anchored in the Domain of a particular ethereal god (determined by the version, and doubtless promulgated to likely candidates by servants of the god). The primary benefit of this is to the god in question, but Sorcerers fearful of disbandment might find the relative surety comforting. (Naturally, this ritual will not function if the Sorcerer is undead. However, few if any undead ever become Caritas Sorcerers in the first place.)

In a broader fantasy setting, the ritual guarantees the Sorcerer his afterlife of choice -- perhaps stealing a judgment often made by the gods. Still, a notably evil sorcerer that forced his way into a Heavenly afterlife might find that angels make even scarier wardens than demons. Demons could be bribable, after all . . .

Time: 24 hours or instant, as description
Essence: all remaining (minimum 1)

Adventure Seeds

- **Birthing Pangs:** If the speculation as to Heaven's involvement is correct, angels will be needed to get the information into the occult community. Even if it isn't, angels could be assigned to spread the word of this pleasing new development. Typical duties for angels could include shepherding Heaven-written manuals on the subject through Media barriers to publication and advertising it on underground message boards, as well as competing with demons for the loyalties of potential sorcerers ready to choose a tradition.
- **The Old Guard:** At a mid-powered game level, all of this may have been a plan of the (canonical but unnamed) Angel of Charity -- who, if Caritas Sorcery gets a foothold in human occult circles, may become the second celestial after Hatiphas, Demon of Sorcery, to become an initiated sorcerer. Hatiphas protects her monopoly with all the jealousy and viciousness one would expect of a demon, and her connections are considerable. Direct assaults are entirely possible, as are subtler attacks with pollutant practices to be spread through the subject.
- **Plan Revelation:** For a higher-powered game, Caritas Sorcery makes a fine "research project" for Eli to have been spending his time on over the last 50 years, wandering the masses of humanity. Perhaps he was seeking enough connection to humans to grasp the principles of an art he could not himself perform, and *had* to estrange himself from Heavenly society to do it. If Hatiphas gets reasonably firm intel that this is what Eli is up to before it gets out, she and Kronos will want to nip it in the bud -- powerful demons may find themselves with entire chapters of the Black Order at their disposal and a directive from Kronos to trap and destroy, or at least memory-strip, an Archangel.
- **Out of the Light:** The Last Gift would make a fine Unusual Background for a character with unique Advantages or Disadvantages of some holy or unholy type; even a short stint in Hell or Heaven would no doubt leave a soul with deep and lasting changes of personality. Coming into contact with the raw energies of the divine or infernal

realms could easily justify any number of unusual abilities in an NPC driving a plot.

Peter Landstrom, Dirty Cop

for *GURPS*

by Wayne Ligon

Any cop in the precinct will tell you Homicide Detective Peter Landstrom is a good guy. He stands by his men, doesn't talk down to the uniformed officers, and he's a good man for a gold shield. A good cop. None of them know about his other activities: informant for the local crime boss, planting evidence, perjury, smuggling, drug-running, and murder-for-hire.

He wasn't always like this, but he discovered the money is better when you play for the other side. It started just after he made detective, one of the youngest ever in the precinct. He took a bullet for his partner and the operation to remove it left him in constant pain. He recovered, but became addicted to painkillers, needing to turn to illegal sources for his "fix." Those sources led him to other sources, who let it be known how much they would appreciate an inside voice in the precinct. Peter had been married for two years and he and his wife been discussing children. The extra money would allow that to happen, and might let him hang onto a wife that he could sense was already slipping away from him. The first cash payments were the start of Peter's downfall.

No children were forthcoming, and Peter's wife divorced him five years later. Since then he's slowly let his "work" consume him. Peter's done almost everything in the book, up to and including murder. What are worse are the good cops he's corrupted in his years on the force. He's created his own little cabal within the department and managed to hide this cancer from Internal Affairs and the occasional crusading DA. These lesser lights act as a shield for Peter, and he won't hesitate to betray any of them if it keeps him out of jail and above suspicion. Some he blackmails while others serve him willingly, but they all know that they will be silenced if they step out of line. He will kill without hesitation to protect his secret, or theirs.

Peter has been quite circumspect about his private activities but he's made minor missteps along the way, especially in the early years. Probes and sting operations have come close to him a few times, but he's always managed to deflect suspicion. He had his closest call yet a few years ago. Jerry Lane, a newcomer to the department, overheard a conversation he wasn't supposed to hear and deduced what was going on. He was torn between exposing a crooked cop and the loyalty he felt to his fellow officers. Unfortunately for Jerry, he confided in a member of Peter's cabal after an abortive attempt to talk to Internal Affairs.

Landstrom arranged for Jerry to be found concealing missing evidence and made sure that anything he might have said to Internal Affairs was discredited. Lane ended up taking his own life; after that, Internal Affairs tended to look elsewhere when accusations of corruption came up. He's made a lot of money over the years, but he continues to live simply. All that cash is waiting in numbered offshore accounts for the day he hands in his gun and badge. At that point, he'll be a millionaire, although perhaps one hounded by the numerous warrants for his arrest once he's no longer around to keep his house in order.

Peter has a lucrative relationship with the local crime boss. He looks out for the boss's men and sees that they get warned about certain investigations. He also leans on the boss's enemies. In return, the boss gives Landstrom useful information; sometimes Peter uses it himself, other times he passes it on to another in his cabal or someone he's grooming so they can get credit for a bust and gain in status. The boss also provides Landstrom's drugs, and other pleasures.

Landstrom is a skilled policeman and detective. He's very good at his job and he's received several commendations but he causes little problem for the Captain. He's no action-movie maverick or hotdog; he's methodical, polite, and doesn't rock the boat. He understands and plays office politics as needed but doesn't seek out a position of importance for himself. More than once, he's been labeled a good team player. He's trying to keep his head down until retirement and then go on permanent vacation out of the country.

Landstrom's "inner circle" consists of:

- Homicide Detective Mark Conway (Peter and Mark are old high school buddies, and Mark has been a willing accomplice for years)
- Robbery Detective Kevin Holms (Landstrom has proof Holms took a series of bribes a number of years ago to cover up an investigation)
- Officer Warren Burns, a clerk in the property room (Burns gets a cut from Landstrom, which he uses to finance his gambling habit)
- Denise Harrison, a scientist in the crime lab (Landstrom and Denise had a stormy affair three years ago and she still thinks about divorcing her husband)
- Vice Detective Carlos Ruiz (an undercover officer who is Landstrom's primary source of narcotics info and also his chief executioner; if there is a man in his cabal that Landstrom fears, it's Ruiz.)

A handful of lesser officers are involved in Landstrom's web of corruption, but most of them don't even know it. They help him by simply trusting him and doing their jobs in ways he subtly directs, and he's constantly on the lookout for someone that can prove useful to him. He has a good rep as a mentor for young officers looking to move up in the department. He also maintains numerous contacts in the local prison among both guards and convicts. He can insure someone has a relatively easy time in confinement, or that he winds up knifed in the showers.

Encounters

Landstrom can be a major secret thorn in the side of any character that needs to deal with the police on a regular basis, especially if they are criminals not on Landstrom's "approved" list or super-straight do-gooders. Landstrom does not hesitate to deal with problems as they occur; he learned early on that a problem ignored simply becomes a bigger problem. Anyone who crosses him gets a beating from some street thug, or they get a "mugging with a message." If that doesn't deter someone, he escalates the violence very quickly. Direct threats to his operation or someone discovering his secret involvement always end with ruination or death for the snoop. Landstrom is a very dangerous and ruthless Enemy to have.

Investigators can run across any number of operations connected to Landstrom but he's been very careful to conceal his tracks. A masterful detective or vigilante might uncover him but ordinary police work stands little chance unless something changes (such as his mob boss buddy dying and someone uncovering records of their working relationship) or Landstrom himself makes a fatal mistake. The most likely way for this to happen is through his little "getaways." For the most part, Landstrom lives like any other working Joe, but three or four times a year his crime boss buddy arranges for him (and perhaps a member or two of his inner circle) to have a very pleasant week in a remote location. It's not unusual for one or two of the woman "working" these parties to disappear. A diligent investigator working backwards from a body found near one of these party sites could trace things back to Landstrom.

Landstrom could be brought down by his lieutenants, any of which has enough evidence on him to at the very least launch a serious investigation. Even if Landstrom managed to deflect the charges and stay out of prison, he'd still be "outed" and unable to operate as he does now. He might even keep his job if there wasn't sufficient proof, but he'd be watched from that point forward. The key to turning any of Landstrom's lieutenants is in either getting them free from whatever hold Landstrom has on them or by making sure they are safe from his revenge.

An interesting twist would be to work backwards from Landstrom to all the lives he's touched and ruined. An unrelated Federal sting operation destroys the offshore bank contacts he has, and millions in laundered money disappears in an instant. Landstrom, distraught, eats his gun in a bus station toilet and the heroes have to work backwards from that sordid end to discover his web of corruption before the rest of his cabal can destroy the evidence.

If a character is a policeman, he could be approached by Landstrom, or blackmailed by him into joining his inner circle. Or he could discover evidence of Landstrom's web of corruption, but not be aware of just who he can trust.

Description: Peter Landstrom is an average-looking man who is aging rather well. He has dark brown hair that hasn't

thinned nearly as much as his colleagues, though it's tinged with gray. He has light brown eyes that don't even require reading glasses yet. He's kept himself trim but he's starting to develop a bulge over his belt. He dresses in off-the-rack suits from department stores and drives a 10-year-old car.

Peter Landstrom, Dirty Cop   *100 points*

Age 42; Human; 6' 2"; 180

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 10 [0].
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 11 [-10]; Per 13 [0]; FP 10 [0].
Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 7 (Knife).

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].
CF: Early 21st Century America
Languages: English (Native) [0]

Advantages

Contact Group (Corrupt Cops) (Effective Skill 12) (9 or less; Usually Reliable) [10]; Contact Group (Street Criminals) (Effective Skill 12) (Somewhat Reliable; 9 or less) [5]; Legal Enforcement Powers 1 [5]; Police Rank 2 [10].

Disadvantages

Addiction (Painkillers) (Cheap) (Highly addictive) [-10]; Callous [-5]; Duty (Police Work) (15 or less (almost always)) [-15]; Secret (Corrupt) (Imprisonment or Exile) [-20].

Quirks

Makes Racial Jokes When He Thinks No One Minds; Habit (Chews Gum or Plays With Objects as Substitute for Smoking); Likes Sandwiches Made From A Particular Deli, Made a Particular Way; Nervous Stomach [-4].

Skills

Area Knowledge (City)-13 (IQ+0) [1]; Area Knowledge (Precinct)-14 (IQ+1) [2]; Computer Operation/TL8-13 (IQ+0) [1]; Criminology/TL8-14 (IQ+1) [4]; Detect Lies-11 (Per-2) [1]; Diplomacy-12 (IQ-1) [2]; Driving/TL8 (Automobile)-10 (DX-1) [1]; Fast-Talk-13 (IQ+0) [2]; Forced Entry-11 (DX+0) [1]; Forensics/TL8-11 (IQ-2) [1]; Gambling-12 (IQ-1) [1]; Garrote-13 (DX+2) [4]; Guns/TL8 (Pistol)-12 (DX+1) [2]; Guns/TL8 (Shotgun)-11 (DX+0) [1]; Interrogation-13 (IQ+0) [2]; Knife-11 (DX+0) [1]; Law (Police Procedure)-14 (IQ+1) [8]; Savoir-Faire (Mafia)-14 (IQ+1) [2]; Savoir-Faire (Police)-14 (IQ+1) [2]; Shadowing-12 (IQ-1) [1]; Smuggling-12 (IQ-1) [1]; Stealth-12 (DX+1) [4]; Streetwise-15 (IQ+2) [8]; Writing-12 (IQ-1) [1].

Pyramid Reviews

Space 1889: The Steppes of Thoth
Space 1889: The Siege of Alclyon

Written by James Swallow *(The Steppes of Thoth)* **& Marc Platt** *(The Siege of Alclyon)*

Published by [Noise Monster Productions](#)

Directed by John Ainsworth

Starring Simon Williams (Captain Roger St. John-Ffolkes), Ivor Danvers (Sir Henry Routledge), Ian Brooker (Professor Golightly), Jo Castleton (Miss Georgina Golightly), Sam Peter Jackson (Hauptmann Werner Lenz), Toby Longworth (Sergeant Horace Carstairs), Jon Weinberg (Mr. Lucas Tyler), Tam Williams (Prince Skerrun), Robert Curbishley (Captain Archer), Christopher Fletcher (King Daryoon), Katarina Olsson (Miss Charlotte Wong), & Philip Madoc (General Karl Heinz Hagen)

Illustrated by Alex Mallinson

70-minute Audio Dramas on CD; $14.95 each

The Steppes of Thoth is the second in Noise Monster Productions' audio dramas set in the world of the original Victorian-era RPG, *Space 1889.* That cast all of the attitudes, morals, manners, and Imperial outlook beyond the confines of our atmosphere to the worlds within the inner Solar System. Traveling the Ether, mankind has found other peoples and species on both Mars and Venus. A lush swamp world, Venus is home to lizard men and dinosaurs, while Mars is dry, dying, and the cradle of a now ancient civilisation. Its huge cities are kept irrigated and connected by a system of canals, also used for travel and trade. The skies are filled by screw galleys and kite barges, kept aloft by the mysterious Liftwood that is only found on the Red Planet. Earth's leading nations have established colonies and legations on Mars, and they continue the feuds they brought from home, while warring with native city-states, projecting power via aerial gunboats and zeppelins.

To this strange new world come the remnants of the crew and passengers of the commercial Ether liner, the *Purbindesh.* Her last voyage and loss was detailed in the first of these audio dramas, *Red Devils.* That told a tale of secrets, greed, social mores, and resentment all of which culminated in the betrayal of the ship to both pirates and German perfidy. Aboard the *Purbindesh* was an artefact known as the Sacred Arena Stone of Alclyon, carried in secret to be handed back to its original owners on Mars. In this way, the British government hoped to cement good relations with the city of Alclyon and her king, and thus secure an important trade route.

The Steppes of Thoth begins mere weeks following the loss of the *Purbindesh.* Sir Henry Routledge, passenger aboard the ill-fated liner and newly appointed Governor of the Crown Colony of Syrtis Major, faces his first crisis in office -- diplomatic and military overtures towards the city-state of Alclyon. Their success can only be prevented if the Arena

Stone can be returned, but the artifact is believed lost aboard the *Purbindesh.* Yet this loss must be kept quiet, or all will be for naught. Under the guise of a mission to search for survivors from the wreck, Sir Henry directs Captain Roger St. John-Ffolkes of the Queen's Own Martian Rifles, to recover the Stone. Accompanied by his loyal batman, Sergeant Carstairs, and guided by the happy-go-lucky American, Mr. Lucas Tyler, already hired by Miss Georgina Golightly, whose father was aboard the liner when she crashed to Mars' surface, the good Captain's journey takes the party along the canals and out into her deserts. Not only are the party threatened by a spate of ill luck and the dangers of the desert, but an old enemy along with other interested groups are hard on its heels.

Just over an hour long, *The Steppes of Thoth* is an exciting tale told in crisp, clear sound that just feeds the listener's imagination. The story nicely touches upon and makes use of key facts about the Mars of *Space 1889.* This includes the differences between the Hill and City Martians, the anti-Earther Ground Cleanser cult, travel by both canal and by air, as well as more of the politics first brought to light in *Red Devils.* This is aided by the appearance of several characters first seen in the previous story.

The cast for *The Steppes of Thoth* all give fine performances. If Simon Williams' Captain St. John-Ffolkes, Toby Longworth's Sergeant Carstairs, and Jon Weinberg's Mr. Lucas Tyler, at first strike the listener as clichés, the actors all take their roles beyond that. Further, with a roll of the dice and flip through the rules, it is not too hard to imagine the various members of the cast as characters from the RPG.

A nice addition to the CD is the accompanying booklet. This showcases various characters and elements of the story, but at only a few pages does bound to leave the reader wanting more. But this is a just a little extra to what is a fine adaptation of a gaming setting to another medium. Indeed, any games publisher wanting to take their intellectual property into the audio format could no better than take a look at, or rather listen to this series of dramas from Noise Monster Productions. If a fan of *Space 1889* or Victorian set Science Fiction, then The *Steppes of Thoth* is a very worthwhile addition to your library.

* * *

The Siege of Alclyon brings to a close the trilogy of audio dramas released by Noise Monster Productions and set in the new interplanetary age of the RPG *Space 1889.* It brings to a head elements, plots, and personality clashes that have been brewing throughout the first two parts, [Red Devils](#) and *The Steppes of Thoth.* All collide and, with luck, are resolved in the Martian city-state of Alclyon, located on an important trade route for British interests on Mars. It is through this city that the British Crown Colony of Syrtis Major obtains its supply of Liftwood, necessary to keep her aerial gunboats in the air, and thus be able to project the power of the British Empire.

Important to any Martian city is its founding stone, and of late, the Sacred Arena Stone of Alclyon has been held by the British back on Earth. In returning it to the King of Alclyon, the newly appointed governor of Syrtis Major, Sir Henry Routledge hopes to win the friendship of the King and thus secure the trade route. Unfortunately all efforts to return the stone have so far failed, thwarted by the underhanded doings of Imperial Germany.

The Kaiser's agents are already suspected of assassinating both Alclyon's King and his heir, as well as having a hand in the loss of the *Purbindesh,* the passenger liner that brought many of the protagonists of these audio dramas to Mars, and whose betrayal and destruction was chronicled in the first part of this trilogy, *Red Devils.* The next in line to the throne, Prince Skerrun, late of both Oxford University the *Purbindesh,* is rumored to have survived the crash of the liner to the surface of Mars, but with his whereabouts and status unknown, it leaves his younger brother, Prince Daryoon to ascend the throne. As King, Daryoon is unprepared to fulfil his new role and the inexperienced monarch has turned to Imperial Germany for help and advice. Nevertheless, with the counsel of the Kaiser's invited representative, he is trying to do the best for his people. Yet General Karl Heinz Hagen finds the young King a wilful charge and also resistant to his suggestion that Alclyon be established as a full German protectorate. Of course, this has not gone unnoticed, and Sir Henry Routledge has placed the city under siege, further straining the relationship between King and General.

Fortunately, King Daryoon is not without friends. One his governess, Miss Charlotte Wong, also late of the *Purbindesh* and until recently the "ward" and "neice" of Sir Henry Routledge, while the other is Captain Roger St. John-Ffolkes of the Queen's Own Martian Rifles, imprisoned after having been found wandering the deserts of Mars. Can he persuade

young Daryoon to unavail himself of General Hagen's offer of protection and as to the benefits of being friends with the British Empire?

After the adventures of *The Steppes of Thoth,* this third audio drama returns to the intrigues first seen in *Red Devils.* It is also more character driven, focusing upon the quartet of General Hagen, Miss Wong, King Daryoon, and Captain St. John-Ffolkes as they try to influence the future of Alclyone from within its battered and beleaguered walls. As the third title in the series and the last of a trilogy, *The Siege of Alclyon* is not a suitable jumping on point, nor does it help that the opening few scenes are initially confusing to the listener -- even if he has heard the previous two instalments. Once past this, this is very much a character piece, which the cast play very well up to. Of note is Katarina Olsson as Miss Charlotte Wong, who has a much greater role than before and who is much better served by the script than in *Red Devils.* Here she is exposed as a frail character despite her duplicitous nature, always looking to take best advantage of the prevailing wind.

As the third and final part, *The Siege of Alclyon* brings the trilogy to an enjoyable, if not rousing, conclusion, one that manages to be in turns both surprising and expected. It is as technically perfect as its predecessors, helping the listener to imagine and realise a conflict on an alien world. It marks the end of a very enjoyable series that has brought to life a popular roleplaying game setting that might not have been so well treated and so well presented in any other format other than the audio drama. It is also clear that there are still tales to be told of the characters still left on the Red Planet, and hopefully, Noise Monster Productions will be allowed to visit them again in future releases. In the mean time, the next and fourth release in this line ***Space 1889*** audio dramas, The Lunar Inheritance, will take us to the Moon. If as good as this trilogy, it is going to be well worth the wait.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Old World Bestiary (for Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay)

Published by [Black Industries](#)

Written by T. S. Luikart & Ian Sturrock with Kate Flack, Ewan Lamont, Alessio Cavatore, Tuomas Pirinen, Chris Pramas & Gave Thorpe

Cover by Christer Sveen

Illustrated by Kori Christensen, Caleb Cleveland, Paul Dainton, Carl Frank, Dave Gallagher, Mark Gibbons, John Gravato, John Hodgson, Neil Hodson, Paul Jeacock, Veronica Jones, Michael W M Kaluta, Karl Kopinski, Travis Kotzebue, Pat Loboyko, Chuck Lucas, Britt Martin, Michael Phillipi, Wayne Reynolds, Karl Richardson, Adrian Smith & John Wigley

128-page full-color hardcover; $29.99

Traditionally, monster books have not been the most exciting supplements in the world. The basic format has been the same since "D&D" carved it in stone and too few writers have tried to diverge from it. In the *Old World Bestiary* supplement for [Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay](#), authors T. S. Luikart and Ian Sturrock diverge like crazy.

The first half of the book tells us what the inhabitants of the setting think about monsters, while the second half contains the stats and rules. This means that players can read the first half without learning every monster's stat line. I often want to show my players a great illustration and then think, "No, they'll see how many hit points it's got and the magic will be lost and the world will end!" There's no danger of that here.

The player-friendly information is split up again according to whether your character has the appropriate Common Knowledge or Academic Knowledge skill. Some is trustworthy, and some isn't. Most of it is given in-character so that by the end of the book you'll know exactly what Old Hob the peasant thinks about a variety of beasts and how that differs from what sundry scholars and Witch Hunters claim is true. Sometimes there's even information from the being in question's point of view, which is amusing -- especially the Ogre's explanation for why he likes eating dog-onna-stick.

Altogether, this means there's a lot of material for each monster. Even the relatively mundane Vampire Bat has six different in-character quotes about it. Some of the less-informative quotes could definitely have been trimmed to make room for a greater variety of creatures.

The Game Master's section starts with some new rules, including new careers for Shamans and spirit-magic spells for them to cast. There are also new Talents to deal with supernatural abilities like Daemonic Aura and the consequences of being gigantic like Unstoppable Blows. The creatures themselves have a new descriptor called Slaughter Margin to give the Game Master a clue how likely to massacre the average soldier each beast is. It's obviously a bit of a joke at the expense of *Dungeons & Dragons'* Challenge Rating, as well as a suggestion of the game's differing tone.

The stats are fair and easy to read. ***Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay's*** percentile system comes into its own here; lacking an in-depth knowledge of the rules you can still compare a Treeman's Weapon Skill of 81% to a Dryad's 48% and see who's going to come out on top in a way that would be more difficult with abstracted figures. Where there's a lot of variance in a monster type there are multiple examples -- five different Skaven are shown to and there are five varieties of Daemon.

It's possible to easily differentiate or power-up individuals by using the careers, either the creature careers like Shaman and Brute or the careers aimed at player characters, which would be just as applicable to Ogres, Vampires and other intelligent, social creatures. A Vampiric Pit Fighter will possess a very different skill set to a Vampiric Courtier, which is a cinch to model with the game's famous career system.

Comparing it to the first edition's bestiary, there are fewer monsters. However, the first edition did have a lot of goofy animals like the Goldworm, which only ate precious metals yet could only travel 100 yards in a random direction before dying. Outside of banks and Dragon's hoards they must have been pretty damn rare. I can't say that I miss them, or the leeches that disguised themselves as treasure chests either. For the nostalgic, Black Industries have brought back some of the less lame of the older monsters as pdf downloads on their website.

The mostly color artwork is top-notch and does well at evoking the game's grim tone. A band of Elven Corsairs drags a bound human slave, a horde of Zombies stretches to the horizon, and Cultists hold up entrails as offerings to the Fly Lord. I recommend arachnophobics turn the page with the hideous Giant Spider quickly, though.

Overall, the ***Old World Bestiary*** is a breath of fresh air, although not without its flaws. As well as cramming too much flavor text into some of the entries, there are a lot of typos. However, these nitpicks don't stop it from being one of the best examples of its type around -- it won the ENnie award for best adversary/monster product with good reason. This book reminds us why fantastical beasts are such an integral part of fantasy games, and it's not because they make good combat fodder. The ***Old World Bestiary*** presents its creatures as a vital part of the setting rather than just opponents to be killed and looted. No matter how you look at it that's a good thing.

--Jody Macgregor

Fortune and Glory, Kid . . . Fortune and Glory

One of the biggest challenges of presenting a game setting is trying to answer the question, "What the heck kind of world is this, anyway?"

I find myself asking this question after getting caught up on the *CSI Season Four* and *CSI: New York Season One* DVD sets in the past week. This is the first extended television viewing I've had in a while, thanks to the DVD mini-player I perched right below my screen last weekend; this was a *lot* of crime-scene-investigation drama action to take in at once. To paraphrase Crow T. Robot, outside of never being able to feel joy again, I don't think *CSI* had any effect on me.

But that's beside the point. See, one of the things that struck me about this series is that the agents of the various CSI teams have enough adventures in a season to assure their ability to write a half-dozen books; many of the cases they handle are "career-maker" cases, assuring a lifetime of Courtroom TV appearances and Larry King interview slots.

Of course, people don't watch television for *The Mundane Adventures Of Boring Cops,* and the need to fill out 22 or so episodes each season puts the pressure on keeping things exciting.

But it raises the question -- how much more or less exciting are these folks' lives supposed to be, compared with what should be expected of them?

There are four possibilities here which spring to mind, relying on a logic diagram comparing rarity versus competency.

The PCs aren't doing anything particularly special. This is the route taken by *CSI, Law & Order,* most comic companies' supers universes, and other franchises. Basically, although their adventures may seem exciting to us as outside observers, the "workload" the heroes are undertaking is normal. Thus when the *CSI: Miami* team meets the *CSI: New York* team, the latter doesn't say, "Wow! Aren't you the ones who cracked the case of the dead actress whose body parts were being mailed to those federal judges?!? We'll never have anything *that* exciting!"

The advantages here are that it's the most common and, arguably, straightforward of the options; you can have as many exciting adventures as you want, without needing to worry about justifying about how they'll fit in with the rest of the campaign world. Sure, someone might have the heroes on for a mid-afternoon talk-show program after keeping the baddies from releasing the anthrax into the water supply, but no one is likely to mention it again.

One disadvantage is that it can be tough to come up with a *really* exciting adventure -- one which is supposed to impact on the campaign world as a whole. In addition, if there is a demand for the heroes to start becoming noteworthy among their peers, either because the GM wants to refocus the campaign or because the players want some more of the limelight, then coming up with an in-game justification for this might be challenging (if such justifications are important to the players).

The PCs aren't encountering anything particularly rare, although they are more competent than average. This was the approach taken by the original *Star Trek.* According to canon (as I understand it), the original *Enterprise* was one of a dozen or so ships of its type to go out on various five-year missions, but the *Enterprise* was the only one to return alive, thanks to the power of Kirk-Fu and the Spockaroonies. In this type of setting the heroes will be looked up to by the "mundanes" of the campaign world. A similar example is the *Stargate: SG1* television series. Here the primary team -- SG1, natch -- are smarter than the average bears. However, there are lots of other teams roaming around, having similar adventures. (In fact, some episodes are even devoted to those exploits.)

The advantages here are that it's easy to explain why the heroes are a part of the action; they're the best they are at what they do, so if the spit is hitting the fan then the Powers That Be would be wise to call them. There's also no shortage of adventure possibilities; not only do the heroes have the chance of dealing with any tales of their own . . . they might also be called upon for mop-up duty for another team's failures.

The disadvantages here are trying to mold the game and players' expectations with the justification as to why these competent folks are all in one spot. For example, the adventures of the *Enterprise* would have been remarkably different if, instead of Scotty the Ultra-Competent Engineer, they had Big Earl the Career Electrician Who's Counting the Days to Retirement. This is easier to handle in some campaigns (for example, if the heroes all gained unique super-powers because of the same origin story) and may not even need explanation to some. Another disadvantage is trying to determine why, exactly, these people are special within a game context. For example, a *Star Trek*-esque game that represents the crew's improved competency via more powerful characters (those built on more character points or the like) will have a different feel than one where their abilities are explained via Fate Points or similar game-affecting mechanics.

Finally, another disadvantage can be that, in a remotely realistic campaign, it's hard to come up with continued justification as to why the heroes don't retire or try to "cash in" on their fame; let's face it . . . once you save the world you can pretty might write your own meal ticket, and trying to justify why your characters are still living in a modest efficiency apartment a week later can take some work.

The PCs are dealing with rare events, and they're more competent than average at dealing with it. This is how some one-off action/adventure movies or book series are dealt with. Thus the NPCs may note that the heroes are world-famous for their exploits, or others might track down the PCs for them to handle One More Mission, because they're good.

The advantage here is that it is probably the most cinematic of the options; the situation is rare, but the heroes are souped-up beyond normal expectations to handle it. (Let's face it; Robert Langdon, the protagonist from *Angels & Demons* and *The Da Vinci Code,* has handled situations far beyond what most Professors of Religious Symbology can reasonably expect, tenure or no.) It's easy to envision the sweep of the camera, and the pacing allows for more "epic" events, even interpersonal ones; you'd better kiss the gal at the end of the scene, because you might not get another chance! One disadvantage is that the longer the campaign continues, the less the "rare" tag applies. It's one thing for Indiana Jones to acquire the unique Ark of the Covenant. It's another if that's one of a dozen such artifacts he's been exposed to in his life. **The PCs are dealing with rare events, but they aren't any more or less competent at dealing with it than normal folks.** This is how most realistic crime novels, "everyman" tales, and -- indeed -- real-life tales play out. It's also the approach taken by most realistic (or semi-realistic) war movies. Basically, the heroes in these stories relied on luck, making the right decision, and determination or pluckiness to prevail.

The advantage is that the drama and excitement are probably more heightened than any other campaign type; after all, since the heroes aren't any more special or skilled than anyone else, there's a significant chance they won't make it!

The disadvantage here are that it can be tough to come up with a focus or reason for the story to have a narrative coherance. For example, it could be argued that the historical event of World War II's D-Day was a "mathematical" heroic event; a large number of soldiers started out fighting there, and a much smaller number survived. In a movie or story, the "camera" would likely remain focused at least in part on the group that survived, since having a book end midway through with, "... and the heroes all died, not knowing that their friends were going to survive." followed by 181 blank pages isn't bestseller material. However, a more realistic "let the chips fall where they may" RPG campaign may not have any choice but to end in such a way unless ideas are put in place ahead of time (such as allowing the players to take over other characters should the first ones fall early on.)

Any of these four campaign types can have problems if there is an attempt to shift the focus. For example, the *Ghostbusters* movies seem to fit the mold of the "rare events, hyper-competent heroes (more or less)." However, the premise of the *Ghostbusters RPG* is that these events aren't as rare as it seemed, and neither are the heroes; the franchising of the Ghostbusters name to new adventuring teams within the *Ghostbusters* universe is required for that premise to work. Likewise any new tales in, say, the *Star Wars* universe needs to deal with the issue of just how special *were* the actions of Luke, Han, Leia, and Jar-Jar.

Of course, none of this matters if it turns out we're all actually living in the *CSI* universe. There, everyone breaks down to murderer, victim, and CSI agent . . . in this case I'd bet good money that I fall firmly in the "dies in the opening scene" category.

--Steven Marsh

Ye Olde Majik Shoppe V

The Final Five Odd, Strange and Just Plain Weird Magical Items

by K. David Ladage

So, after 21 glimpses into the mind of Kendalge, what do we know of him? We know he was married, but we cannot say for sure how many times. We know that he was very old when he died, but we cannot say for sure just how many centuries passed from his birth to his death -- or how this man that appeared to be human managed to live so long. We know that he was a father, but cannot say to how many children. We know that he was brilliant, intelligent, wise, and possibly even insane.

We know that the Second Age was defined by the man; we even know that he was quite possibly the greatest wizard, sorcerer, enchanter, and philosopher of his time (or any other era). Yet, the one thing we cannot say for sure is if the man ever really existed at all. All that we can say with real certainty is that the impact of this man's legacy is all that remains -- and perhaps that is enough.

There are the treaties that bear his name, and what remains of his enchanted works, to be sure. But these are not as lasting as the morality tales that grow in predominance and stature each passing generation. Stories in which the Great Kendalge teaches children and adults alike the virtues of a life lived in harmony with the will of Higher Powers. Even if Kendalge was not one man, or never really existed at all -- would it cause anyone any harm to listen to the echoes of his voice today?

Below are five more looks - our last in this series - into the legacy of a man that may not have existed . . . but was as real as any who ever lived.

Velveteen Cloth

The Velveteen Cloth was a gift from Kendalge to the Lady Gwen of Three-Rivers, Viscountess of Eastwick, during the reign of King Archibald the Wise. At that same time, he sent an identical gift to Lady Charlotte of Greybonne. The gifts were delivered as six bolts of fine velvet. The cloth was as fine as the highest quality silk; especially soft to the touch and flowed as though it were as light as air. One diary entry from Lady Gwen indicated that the cloth "feels much like you are being caressed by a cloud, as though walking nude in a cool fog bank."

The exact enchantments and

[1] According to the writings of Luscious Von Griever (Court Jester of King Archibald the Wise as well as King Frederick XIX), Lady Gwen was well known in the courts for using her feminine charms to get her way. She had just spent three months making all manner of attempts to seduce the King's son, Prince Frederick. She wanted him to ask her hand in marriage. This would be a strong political move for her, given the fact that the Three-Rivers family has lost favor in the courts (and thus, much land) to the family of Lord Dewar of Greybonne, Viscount of Timberland. Lord Dewar had an eligible daughter, Charlotte, whom Prince Frederick had taking a liking to.

Lady Gwen had her finest seamstresses design and create a gorgeous dress for her to wear to the Prince's birthday celebration. Once the dress was completed, it is said, that some proclaimed it to be the most beautiful garment ever produced (although many believe that this is just an embellishment of the story). One day after the dress was completed, all of the thread seemed to disappear creating a seamless gown. When Lady Gwen put it on she is said to have remarked that the garment was so light, "it is as if I were not wearing anything at all."

Not knowing that Kendalge had delivered six bolts of the cloth to Lady Charlotte as well, Lady Gwen was shocked to find that Charlotte was also wearing a fine dress made of the same Velveteen Cloth. Still, records of the time indicate that

magical properties of the Velveteen Cloth are not known. What is known is that the cloth will create seamless connections to itself when sewn -- the thread used seems to disappear in this transition. The fabric is exceptionally sturdy and light. It has the same weight as silk, while maintaining a protective equivalent of heavy leather, or light chain. Some writings claim that the cloth can shift colors, or even reconfigure itself into other styles of clothing to fit the nature of the surroundings. However, these writings are from third- and fourth-generation sources, and are largely discounted.

What happens to the wearer is also in debate. Some claim that the cloth reveals the motivations of the wearer, or the intent of a given action. Others claim that the cloth does nothing to the wearer at all.

she, being a consummate politician, did not even smirk. Charlotte, however, was not as controlled.

As was customary, each eligible Lady was to have one dance with the Prince. Lady Gwen was among the first. As they danced, Lady Gwen claims to have become overcome with a sense of warmth, well-being, comfort, and calm. She smiled gently into the eyes of the Prince, kissed him, and smiled before she excused herself. She went back to her seat, where she is said to have fallen asleep shortly thereafter.

An hour later, it was time for Lady Charlotte to dance with the Prince. As Prince Frederick was already smitten with her, it was not long into the dance that they embraced and kissed. However, at this point Charlotte is said to have gone berserk. She slapped the Prince in the face, and began screaming. She accused him of hurting her, then moved on to accuse the Royal Court of conspiring against her. At that point, Charlotte was removed from the Palace, and the King decreed that his son would marry Lady Gwen of Three-Rivers. Six years later, King Archibald died, and King Frederick XIX assumed the throne with Lady Gwen at his side.

Those that do not believe that the Velveteen Cloth reveals intent and motivations point out that Lady Gwen wanted to marry the Prince due to political motivations. However, for all of her political maneuvering, her intent was neither malicious nor Machiavellian. She was trying to re-establish her family name; after marrying the Prince, she was a faithful and trusted partner. Charlotte, history states, had other plans. While imprisoned, she confessed to having concocted a plot to seduce the Prince, assassinate him once he ascended to the throne and maneuver her family into position to take control of the crown. She was beheaded three months before King Frederick's coronation.

all. The only first hand account to survive is from the Court Jester of King Archibald the Wise [1]. Of the 12 bolts of cloth delivered to Ladies Gwen and Charlotte, they only used four bolts between them. Both Ladies were buried in the dresses that they made.

Wolverine-Skin

If ever someone were going to classify an enchanted item of Kendalge's as *cursed,* the top two contenders would be the Infernal Loom and the Wolverine Skin. Most who know of the item swear it could not be something that Kendalge created -- granted, those are the same people that claim that the Infernal Loom could not have been created by Kendalge either. The Wolverine Skin seems to serve no real positive purpose; the stories surrounding it tell no morality tale, and in the end Kendalge seemed to have no control over the thing. But several texts (including second and third generation sources) describe his many attempts to apologize for having unleashed the accursed item upon the world. In other words, Kendalge claimed it as his own (no so handi-) work; in this volume we will make no attempt to refute that claim.

The wolverine skin, under all forms of physical and magical observation, appears to be nothing more than the prepared skin of a huge wolverine [2]

[2] The Wolverine-Skin usually appears as a skin from a wolverine. However, their are some texts that suggest that the skin can appear in other forms as well. The form is always a mammal -- badger, bear, horse, lion, tiger, and wolf are all described. It is not clear if these are the same items, or if they are separate items all together; if they are separate, it is not known if Kendalge created

(perhaps a giant or dire version of that creature). The skin is of such quality that it could be -- and often has been -- used as a nice-sized rug. During all phases of the moon save the full moon, the skin is completely inanimate. In reality, the skin is alive: it is some sort of hybrid magical creature that seems to be equal parts construct, animated dead, and lycanthrope. During the full moon, the skin will occasionally transform into a hideous, blood-thirsty construct/undead/were-wolverine killing machine.

The few accounts that describe the beast are so contradictory as to be nearly unusable. What common elements exist describe a humanoid bestial creature standing between eight and nine feet tall, with long, powerful arms that reach the ground; this allows the creature to run in a hunched posture on all fours, much like an ape. The claws are retractable; the fully extended talons are about 12 inches long.

One account with the beast, however, is considered definitive. Written by Sir Chaddwyke Earl of Overcliffe approximately six years before he was knighted, Chaddwyke describes an encounter with the beast around midnight during the Winter Festivals in the Year of the Emerald Star. He and his entourage were returning home after a night of revelry when they chanced to meet the beast as it was engaged in combat with Sir Greybar of the Verdant Wood. Writes Chaddwyke: "[T]he beast was most certainly derived from a wolverine. However, much of the beast seemed to be made of inanimate matter. I could see wood, clay, stone, and even polished metal making up portions of the exposed skeletal framework. If I were to venture a guess, I would say that the beast absorbs items near it when it makes its transformation . . ." In the combat, both Greybar and Chaddwyke were injured, and three others lost their lives before the beast ran off into the darkness of the nearby trees.

them all, or if the creature can infect other animals, much akin to standard lycanthropy. If this is the case, one has to wonder about the fates of Sir Greybar and Sir Chaddwyke.

Also, it is not known if the skin is able to be destroyed when it is not animate (since no such attempt has ever been recorded), nor is it clear what happens if the beast is destroyed (since none have ever been able to do so).

In several texts, it is clear that the skin does not transform during *every* full moon. What causes the transformation to take place during some full moon cycles and not during others is not understood; some claim it is totally random.

Xavier's Battle-Axe

Of all of the weapons that Kendalge enchanted over the years, none is quite so odd as Xavier's Battle-Axe. Sir Xavier, the rather infamous knight, was more formally known as Lord Xavier, Earl of the Eastern Seaboard, Duke of Chesterfield, Wolfsbane, Wyrmslayer. He was a man of few words (although his battle cries are said to have been so fierce as to be capable of producing nightmares in some); he was fairly handsome and highly charismatic -- a man of action. But mostly he was dangerous. Not only to those that would dare to oppose him in battle, but also to the men that he brought into that battle. As a tactician, he felt that accomplishing his goal quickly -- no matter the cost -- was best. Protection, defense, and preservation of forces was something he felt could be considered when the battle was won.

Sir Xavier commissioned an axe from Kendalge. Xavier wanted an axe that could destroy any foe in one hit. Kendalge tried desperately to explain to the knight that what he needed was to plan his battles around the ideas of accomplishing his goal with the fewest casualties. Unfortunately, Xavier was a popular nobleman, and had many that thought much as he did -- the peasantry that made up the bulk of the fighting forces was an expendable (and cheap) resource.

What Kendalge created would be discussed for a century after its creation. The great axe was incredibly sharp and durable. Xavier is said to have commented that he had wielded the axe in several major battles, had cut through flesh, bone, and armor -- yet the blade had not one scratch, nor had it dulled in the slightest. During the Battle of Three Rivers Valley, Xavier needed to stop an advancing line of chariots -- and so it is said he felled an oak tree with a single swing of the axe, blocking the Camden Road, giving his men time to advance into position. Many other common and relatively uncommon weapon enchantments were included in the axe as well. Xavier even discovered that the axe was effective against incorporeal creatures. He was quite happy.

It was seven years after the axe was completed and delivered to Xavier that he would discover the most important quality that Kendalge had placed into the axe: it had a quasi-vampiric nature. One of Xavier's battle cries (which one is a subject of great controversy) was enchanted into the axe as a trigger. When spoken loudly by the wielder, the axe would draw life energy from Xavier as well as all of his allies within 30 feet. This energy was then converted in a negative-life energy and unleashed onto the next thing that was unfortunate enough to be struck by the axe [3]. Allies that were struck down by this life drain, as well as those slain by the negative energy that was released by the axe, were immune to all forms of magical healing. Unfortunately, this mattered not to Xavier.

Xavier came to use this ability far too often, and this would lead to his death . . . less than six months after discovering the ability. His demise would lead to a struggle to control the axe. The so-called War of the Axe lasted nearly 45 years, and came dangerously close to shattering the Royal Courts.

[3] Unlike most of the magical items discussed in this series, Xavier's Battleaxe needs a rules-level discussion to be fully understood and appreciated. Below, you will find the rules for using this magical axe in *FUDGE, GURPS Fourth Edition,* and the *d20 System.*

The life-energy-drain/redirection ability is activated when the trigger word (or phrase) is spoken in a loud, clear voice by the wielder. Anyone slain by the life-drain that come from this cannot be raised, resurrected, reincarnated, or otherwise brought back to life. Once charged, the energy in the axe will remain until unleashed, or for one month -- whichever comes first. The axe cannot be charged multiple times. If the axe has negative energy being stored within it, then no further charging of the axe can take place until that energy has been released.

FUDGE

Xavier's Battle Axe is a powerful magic item. It is indestructible, can strike incorporeal beings without penalty, and is treated as a Battle Axe that receives a +2 magical bonus to to-hit rolls and to its Offensive Rating.

When the triggered ability is activated, the wielder is immediately drained of life energy (two wounds, each of severity 2dF+3; each wound rolled separately); each ally within range is also drained of life energy (one wound, severity 2dF+3; each ally rolled separately). The total of all of the wound rolls is the amount of negative energy the axe is storing. The next individual (or object!) that is struck by the axe takes damage from the axe as normal, with an additional bonus to the Offensive rating equal +1 for every 3 points of negative energy stored (round down), to a maximum of +5 (at 15 points of negative energy).

Example: A skilled warrior is wielding Xavier's Battle-Axe; he has six allies in range. He activates the ability, and is immediately drained of life, suffering two wounds (severity 3 and 4); each of his allies that are in range are immediately drained of life, suffering one wound each (severity 2, 2, 3, 3, 4, and 4). This is a total drain of 25 points of negative energy. Assuming that the warrior survives, if the warrior strikes something with the axe at some point later in the battle, it will take damage applying all standard and magical offensive factor modifiers including an additional negative-energy bonus of +5. The axe has been drained of negative energy.

GURPS Fourth Edition

Xavier's Battle Axe is a powerful magic item. It is indestructible, and is treated as a Battle Axe that has the following enchantments on it: Accuracy +2, Penetrating Weapon (5), Puissance +2, and Ghost Weapon.

When the triggered ability is activated, the wielder is immediately drained of life energy (see chart below); each ally within range is also drained of life energy (see chart below; each ally rolled separately). The total of all of the damage drained is the amount of negative energy the axe is storing. The next individual (or object!) that is struck by the axe takes damage from the axe as normal, with an additional magical bonus of +1 point of damage for every point of negative energy stored, to a maximum of +15 points.

Life Drained From . . .

Roll	Wielder	Allies
1	3 hps	1 hp
2	4 hps	1 hps
3	4 hps	2 hps
4	5 hps	2 hps
5	5 hps	3 hps
6	6 hps	3 hps

Example: A skilled warrior is wielding Xavier's Battle-Axe; he has six allies in range. He activates the ability, and is immediately drained of life (rolls and loses 4 hit points); each of his allies that are in range are immediately drained of life (after rolling, they lose 1, 1, 2, 2, 3, and 3 hit points). This is a total drain of 16 points of negative energy. Assuming that the warrior survives, at some point later in the battle, if the warrior strikes something with the axe, it will take damage, including a +15 bonus from negative energy. The axe has been drained of negative energy.

d20 System

Xavier's Battle-Axe is an artifact. It is indestructible, and is treated as a +3 Adamantine Battle Axe with the Ghost Touch quality in addition to the triggered life-drain-and-redirection ability.

When the triggered ability is activated, the wielder is immediately drained of 1d6 hit points per two character levels of the wielder (round up). Each ally within range is drained of 1d6 hit points per three character levels of the wielder (round down, one die minimum; each ally rolled separately). The next individual (or object!) that is struck by the axe takes the normal damage, plus 1d6 negative-energy damage per die that was drained by the axe, to a maximum of +20d6.

Example: A 5th-level fighter is wielding Xavier's Battle-Axe; he has six allies in range. He activates the ability, and is immediately drained of 3d6 hit points; each of his allies that are in range are immediately drained of 1d6 hit points. This is a total drain of 9 dice of drained life energy. Assuming that the fighter survives, at some point later in the battle, if the fighter strikes something with the axe, in addition to the normal damage, it will deal +9d6 negative-energy damage. The axe has been drained of negative energy.

Yarmulke Of Absolute Truth

As has been discussed, Kendalge paid homage to many religions -- praying to some 60 or more gods. Over the course of this life, he was active in at a dozen organized religions. Most of the time, he would study the faith, find elements of truth, and thus take an active interest in the tenets of the faith. After time, he would discover

[4] So now what? You have this mystery that involves a set of oddly written *truths* and a yarmulke that may or may not have anything to do with them. Was Kendalge playing a practical joke

inconsistencies, or elements of the faith that required that he set aside common sense, believe in things that were patently absurd, or even disbelieve that which was observable. So, in those stages, his interest would become jaded and he would move on. At no time, however, did he lose respect for those that believed in the faith; after all, in each faith he learned new things -- new truths of the world, new truths within himself.

Near the end of his life, Kendalge began studying all of the religions he had once practiced. He looked at those elements of faith that they had in common and those things that -- although not common -- did not contradict another religion. He began to see patterns that he described as "akin to looking into the sky and seeing the clouds forming into the shapes of letters and words."

From this work (which took him nearly three decades) he began to formulate the basic elements of faith in what he called the *Universal Church of Truth.* The idea of this church was that it followed no particular god, no single dogma; it followed the truths that were evident in all gods, that were practiced or preached in all dogmas. Although he died prior to completing the work on this Universal Faith, he did manage to write down a listing of 216 core concepts that, he claimed, formed the basis of *absolute truth.* This list would later become the foundation for the *Church of the Eternal Flame,* founded by Gerard d'la Raven (a distant cousin to the infamous Atlas d'La Raven) in the second century of the Third Age. Gerard called them the *foundational elements of absolute truth.* The major problem with this listing is that all 216 are written as koans (short, riddle-like paradoxes) that have caused no end of debate over their true meaning.

In the final scroll of the writings that Kendalge produced on this topic, he discussed a yarmulke (or a *skull cap*). This struck many as odd, as the yarmulke is worn only by the male practitioners of the more orthodox and conservative faiths practiced by those inhabitants of the lands far across the Great Western Ocean-Sea. He claimed to have found this piece of headgear while negotiating a trade treaty with the Kingdom of the Setting Sun. The yarmulke, he claimed, was the key to understanding 36 of the core concepts. Unfortunately, Kendalge does not specify *which* 36 concepts it is key to the understanding of; and none of koans make any mention of a yarmulke, skull-cap, hat, helm, or any other form of headgear for that matter. The particular yarmulke Kendalge had has been lost to history; the followers of the Church of the Eternal Flame wear the yarmulke to this day.

So what is the meaning of the 216 so-called *foundational elements of absolute truth,* and how does the yarmulke fit into all of this? Nobody is sure; it remains one of the many unsolved mysteries surrounding the life of Kendalge. [4]

on everyone, or is their something to this? If you want their to be something to this whole thing, their are several ways it can be done. Below is one example of how to use this mystery in a campaign:

The *National Treasure* Option: The Yarmulke of Absolute Truth contains an enchanted map. The map can only be seen if the yarmulke is placed over the crystal ball of the Dreamcatcher and the words of the first koan are spoken (in fact, the yarmulke could have been incorporated into the sleeping cap of the Dreamcatcher without anyone realizing it). This map reveals the location of the Ring of Kendalge. The ring allows the mystery of the 2nd and 3rd koans to be understood or seen, which leads to another of Kendalge's magic items and the truth of 1-3 more koans. And so on and so forth . . . until a clue reveals the meaning of the 36th koan and that takes our heroes to the Naos Sanctum. Here, the heros find the truth in the rest of the 216 koans which leads to . . . [insert huge, earth shattering, campaign altering truth here].

Other options include: The *Dragonslayer* option (where the koans are an incantation that will allow the yarmulke to bring Kendalge back to life to fight some great and terrible evil that requires that he sacrifice himself to defeat it); the *Stargate* option (where the yarmulke is a powerful magical item that opens up into a huge gateway that can wisp the heroes off to any one of 216 possible dimensions depending upon which koan is spoken into the gate once it is activated); or even the *Scooby Doo* option (where the whole thing is a hoax designed to draw in unsuspecting persons seeking power and Things Man Was Not Meant To Know and send them to their doom -- and it would have worked, too, if it were not for those meddling kids!).

Zodiac Plant

Kendalge's third wife, Charmaine, had a love of azaleas. This was the plant that was used as a basis for the first [Houseplant](#) after all. So it should not come as a shock to know that Kendalge created other enchanted items using the beautiful flowering bush as a basis. The one that swept the heart of Charmaine, and was used as a gift during Kendalge's proposal, was the Zodiac Plant. The Zodiac Plant is a bush- like plant, similar in size and appearance to a [Catawba Rhododendron](#). The flower of this plant, however, is the interesting part.

The Zodiac Plant blooms 12 times per year. Each blooming will come with the new buds forming over a period of one or two days. After a total of 14 to 16 days, the flowers are at their peak in size and brightness. This will be maintained for about 10 to 12 days. Then the flowers fade, wilt, and are shed completely after 28 to 32 days, after which the cycle starts up again. Most remarkable is the fact that the flowers will have a different appearance each time -- and that the appearance of the flowers is consistent between all Zodiac Plants everywhere at that time. The shape of the flower, color of the flower's petals and filament, as well as the scent are all variable.

A decade or so after the marriage to Charmaine, Kendalge used the Zodiac flower in his alchemical experiments. This resulted in a mutated version of the Zodiac Plant that has highly enchanted flowers. The exact effect of these flowers is highly variable. Some texts suggest that the appearance of the flower can give some clue as to the nature of the effects but this has never been verified. The only way to release the magical properties of the flower is to carefully cut it from the plant, place the entire flower in a cup of hot water and drink the tea that results.

A complete rendering of the possible magical properties that the Zodiac Plant can produce is far beyond the scope of this volume [5]. The effects have been beneficial (such as having curative properties, or creating a sense of euphoria) to the benign (such as causing people's eyes to change color, or making hair grow quickly) to the baneful (such as inducing nausea or causing people's memories to fade). The effects range from temporary (mere moments) to long lasting (man years). It it believed, however, that short of death, no effect of the Zodiac Flower Tea is permanent.

[5] The appearance of the flowers of the Zodiac Plant vary with (a) the shape of the flower, (b) the color of the flower petals, (c) color of the flower filament, and the (d) the scent of the flower. To randomly determine the appearance of the flower, roll d66 four times and cross reference the results.

Color Of Petals (roll 2d)

Roll	Shape Of Flower	Or Filament	Scent Of Flower
11	Bell-shaped	Black	Aromatic
12	Bell-shaped	Black	Aromatic
13	Bell-shaped	Black-Grey	Aromatic
14	Bowl-shaped	Grey-Black	Aromatic
15	Bowl-shaped	Grey	Citrus
16	Bowl-shaped	Grey	Citrus
21	Cross-shaped	Grey-White	Citrus
22	Cross-shaped	White-Grey	Citrus
23	Cross-shaped	White	Exotic
24	Funnel-shaped	White	Floral
25	Funnel-shaped	White-Red	Floral
26	Funnel-shaped	Red-White	Floral
31	Lipped	Red	Floral
32	Lipped	Red	Floral
33	Lipped	Red-Orange	Floral
34	Pea-shaped	Orange-Red	Floral
35	Pea-shaped	Orange	Floral
36	Pea-shaped	Orange	Floral

41	Salverform	Orange-Yellow	Fruity
42	Salverform	Yellow-Orange	Fruity
43	Salverform	Yellow	Fruity
44	Saucer-shaped	Yellow	Heavy/Musky
45	Saucer-shaped	Yellow-Green	Heavy/Musky
46	Saucer-shaped	Green-Yellow	Heavy/Musky
51	Star-shaped	Green	No Scent
52	Star-shaped	Green	No Scent
53	Star-shaped	Green-Blue	No Scent
54	Trumpet-shaped	Blue-Green	No Scent
55	Trumpet-shaped	Blue	No Scent
56	Trumpet-shaped	Blue	No Scent
61	Tubular	Blue-Indigo	Peppery
62	Tubular	Indigo-Blue	Peppery
63	Tubular	Indigo/Violet	Spicy
64	Urn-shaped	Indigo/Violet	Spicy
65	Urn-shaped	Violet-Black	Sweet
66	Urn-shaped	Black-Violet	Sweet

Shape: examples of each of these shapes of flowers can be found at http://theseedsite.co.uk/flowershapes.html. As an option, you can roll on this chart twice and cross the effects (i.e.: tubular-bell-shaped, lipped-star-shaped, bowl-saucer-shaped, etc.)

Color: for the color of the petals, this is the *primary* color. If two colors are listed, this means that it is a shade of the first color that leans toward the second (i.e.: blue-green is blue that leans toward the green side while green-blue is green that leans toward the blue side). You may roll a d6 to determine the number of additional colors on the petals if you would like (1-3: 0 additional colors; 4-5: 1 additional color; 6: 1d3 additional colors). These secondary colors can come in highlights, spots, splashes, or anything else you can think of.

Scents: these are general categories of scent. For more information of the scents of flowers, go to http://www.flowers.org.uk/flowers/trivia/scent.htm.

Pyramid Review

Breaking the Ice: A Game of Love For Two

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Breaking the Ice: A Game of Love for Two is a little game that deals with that most difficult of subjects -- love. Few if any RPGs really address this subject, perhaps the most notable being the Shoujo titles *Heart Quest: Romantic Roleplaying in the World's of Shoujo Manga* and *[Hearts, Swords, Flowers,](#)* the latter better than the former. Yet both draw from a very specific genre and culture -- Japan's Shoujo Manga -- and in comparison few if any occidental set RPGs approach the subject to the same degree although it may figure mechanically and thematically.

Breaking the Ice is different, tackling the subject directly in the form of two people playing a couple going on their first three dates. Taking it in turns, they narrate and guide through the major events -- the sort of memorable things that they might be able to tell their grandchildren someday -- of the three dates, aiming to create and find compatibilities between, and increase the attraction between the pair. Hopefully enough, that the couple will form a long and lasting relationship, if not actually marry. In doing so, the game sets out to model the romantic movie and its various sub-genres such as the dramatic *(Romeo and Juliet),* dark humor *(Grosse Point Blank),* comedy *(When Harry Met Sally),* screwball comedy *(His Girl Friday),* and so on. There is also potential for plugging *Breaking the Ice* into both other RPGs and genres to handle what they do not.

From start to finish, a game of *Breaking the Ice* lasts just a couple of hours, an evening at most, and that includes character generation. And for all that, the participants need nothing more than the rules, the joint character sheet, paper and pencils, and a handful of six-sided dice. Before the game begins the players sit down and decide upon its genre (as above) and its rating. The latter is given in terms of American movie ratings (G, PG, PG-13, R, and NC-17), indicating whether or not sex will figure in the story and how. Lines and veils can also be agreed upon, further defining the game's sexual boundaries and how it will be represented.

The game's interaction really begins character generation and a radical switch. For the latter, the players take a difference between each other and then swap it for their characters. This can be by gender, sexual preference, ethnicity, politics, social grouping, and so on. The default though, is a gender switch, which admittedly is not to everyone's taste, which is why there are so many other options. The game's long running example does employ this default, but tastefully so, and is best displayed in Barry Deutsch's humorous depiction of Jed and Meimei.

A character is defined by several Traits, usually between four and six. Falling into three categories -- Self, Work, and Play -- they are drawn and defined from a Word Web created cooperatively by the players. This is done for both characters and is really an exercise in word association that begins with each player's favorite color. For example, Keri puts yellow down as her favorite color, and together with Geoff, they evolve her character's Word Web thusly: yellow-sun-beach-swimming-sunburn-lotion, yellow-bright-happy-sunglasses, yellow-cornfield-farming-countryside, and yellow-cowardice-scared. From this Keri and Geoff work out her character's Traits as happy (Self), works in a pharmacy (Work), grew up on farm (Self), and likes sunbathing (Play). All right, it's not the best example, but it shows

the basic principle. In addition, a character possesses a Conflict, representing a difficulty for the forthcoming date. It can be as mundane as going through a messy divorce or as outré as having to baby-sit a leopard or being a hitman on the job.

Once created, the players are ready to undertake the first date. Each date consists of several turns, with a turn representing one scene and lasting as long as it takes to play out a particular set of notable events during that date. Besides playing their characters, the players undertake two different roles during a turn before swapping for the next turn. One is the Active Player; this person sets the scene, establishes the time of the date, and makes all dice rolls, primarily Attraction Rolls. The other is the Guide, who -- besides representing his own character -- holds all of the dice, gives feedback to the Active Player, and awards all dice used in Attraction Rolls. The Guide is also free to ask the Active Player for more details, to encourage him to roleplay, and even make suggestions that the Active Player can choose to incorporate into his narration.

Dice rolls are made throughout a turn, and consist of more than the Attraction Roll, though these are the game's mechanical heart. Initially, only one die is rolled in an Attraction Roll, this equal to the potential couple's starting Attraction Level of one. The aim here is to roll enough successes (one success being a throw of five or six) to raise the Attraction Level for the next. Fortunately, the Active Player can be awarded more dice by the Guide under certain circumstances and at his whim. Bonus Dice are awarded, up to three per turn, when the Active Player involves the traits of either character in his narration, has his character be nice to that of the Guide's, narrates well, or accepts a Guide's suggestion. Bonus Dice are rolled with the Attraction Roll, and any Bonus Dice that do not roll successes become Re-Roll Dice. They are awarded for the exactly the same reasons as Bonus Dice, except that where Bonus Dice are awarded for adding favorable elements to the story, Re-Roll Dice are given out when the Active Player brings negative complications into it. Conflict Dice are a singular award of three dice for involving a character's Conflict in the story. These are rolled immediately, but failures do not become Re-Rolls. Finally, Compatibly Dice are a two dice award gained once per turn when both the Active Player and the Guide jointly narrate a shared Trait.

So what do you with what seems like a lot of dice rolls? All of the successes count within a turn. Three successes are enough to increase the couple's Attraction Level by one, and thus the number of dice available on the next date. The Active Player is also required to explain why the two characters are more attracted to each other in terms of the story told so far. With four successes a single Compatibility can be created, a shared Trait that can figure in a later date and grant Compatibly Dice.

A turn ends when the Attraction Level has been raised, a new Compatibility has been created, all possible dice have been awarded and thrown, or the Active Player decides to end it. The roles then reverse. Should no successes have been rolled during a turn, then this also needs to be explained. Turns continue in this manner until it agreed that the date is over.

The same mechanics and narrative process are used for the second and third dates. After the third date has been played out, a final Attraction Roll is made with a bonus die gained for every Compatibility shared between the couple. Each success rolled here makes an Attraction Level permanent, and it is this that counts when the players take stock of their trio of dates. An Attraction Level of five achieved in this way, and five or more Compatibilities are enough to ensure that the newly formed relationship has a future.

Although the dice drive the game, they are very much fueled by player narration and interaction. Further successful dice rolls top up this narrative fuel reserve with increased Attraction Levels and Compatibilities, which give the Active Player more to draw from in his storytelling.

If the mechanics underlie and drive the narrative forward, imitating the filmic structure that **Breaking the Ice** draws from, they also emulate the genre and structure with the dice types. Most notably, the Re-Rolls represent the mishaps that can occur on a date, and the Conflict Dice bring in the character's problems.

Breaking the Ice is clearly written, pleasingly illustrated, and comes with running advice and examples, the former also covering the more mature aspects of the genre. Suggestions allow for multiple pairs to play, and using **Breaking the Ice** to play in ostensibly other genres and genres. Examples include *Star Wars, LadyHawke,* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon.* These guidelines could certainly be applied to most RPGs, and **Breaking the Ice's** mechanics could

be employed to handle romance in such games. The final page of advice suggests how ***Breaking the Ice*** could be used as a method of exploring deeper issues.

Even though ***Breaking the Ice*** is designed to handle a single narrative path -- go on three dates and (hopefully) find love -- flexibility comes in how the path is followed, in the collaborative and cooperative process of narrating and creating the story of those dates. Of course, ***Breaking the Ice*** is unlikely to appeal to the gamer that prefers to "roll the dice and talk with his sword." Even in appealing to the more mature player, the game's genre and subject is a touchy one, if not full of potential potholes. For those that can handle its softer and more subtle subject matter (and that does not just include the ladies), ***Breaking the Ice*** is a disarmingly simple, clever little game.

--Matthew Pook

More Questions Than Answers

Loving Your FLGS to Death

by Heather Barnhorst

Sometimes, a person can love something so hard that he loves it to death -- as is often the case when gamers love their FLGS.

In *Call of the Mall*, Paco Underhill chronicles the rise and fall of the great suburban mall -- that mecca for both stay-at-home mothers and angst-ridden teenagers looking for a shopping sanctuary where they can get out from under their parents' gimlet gazes. Mr. Underhill discusses how malls came to be seen as "quasi-public" spaces that developed an accretion of usage; different groups used malls for different purposes. Consumers, charitable groups, and seniors looking for a safe place for their exercise regimen all used malls in ways not anticipated by their designers. Malls responded by, in some ways, being all things to all customers; the idea was that once a mom dropped off little Debbie for her dance demo that she might just head over to Starbucks for a cup of coffee. Yet, not all usages were entirely compatible and tensions between different user groups developed.

Malls as shopping juggernauts have fallen into disrepute as outdoor malls, pedestrian shopping centers and factory outlet stores have succeeded in loosening the American purse strings in their favor. But look around you -- the concept of the quasi-public space within commercial/retail space still thrives. Consumers value retail businesses for their own reasons which are often outside of the pure consumer experience. This idea may be particularly applicable to places that you and I both love -- book stores, coffee houses, and yes, the Favorite Local Game Store.

Consider the retailer: The retailer's goal should be the same as any other entrepreneur's; he wants to make money. Maybe he has a family to support; perhaps he wants to create a nest egg for when he retires; alternatively he is retired and he is living out his dream of being his own boss; then again he may simply want to try his hand at building a business from scratch. But the point is that he is a game retailer for both fun and profit. If there isn't any profit, there won't be much fun. He likes filthy lucre (I know, hush my mouth) and if he tells you any differently then he is either lying or he is about to learn some very nasty lessons in the realities of the world.

Fledgling retailers have told me that they are not in the business to make money. They want to create a place where gamers can come to play games and be around other gamers. They want to provide the kind of store they could never find and they are willing to suffer for their "art" to make it so. This is complete bunk. Me? I've loved games (as some of you may be aware) since my first *Candy Land* game. Game-playing and the art of creating something wonderfully social and interactive out of a sterile void are satisfying pursuits but I will arm-wrestle anyone to the death who tries to tell me that loving games and selling games are antithetical activities. Making money off of games should never be seen as a betrayal to the spirit of playing games. Every day, I experience the opportunity to take customers who want a game and pair them up with a game that they will enjoy. In my line of work it just doesn't get better than that, but I do defy anyone to tell me that I don't deserve a living wage, professional respect, and good benefits as a result of my hard work. I would even suggest that any retailer who disagrees with me is probably a retailer who either has a very large trust fund (also read as understanding and loving spouse) or who will be out of business in only a few years -- not only out of business but probably a much-embittered unemployed retailer as well.

What a terrible thought --- your FLGS goes out of business because the owner refuses to treat his store like a business. Let's pray that this self-same proprietor wakes up some day (and some of them do), looks around him, and says to his long-suffering but darling wife (or husband, as the case may be), "Honey, I do believe that I have been lying to you and to myself -- we cannot live on air and idealism." This retailer suddenly discovers his brain and decides to run his business like it *is* a business and very unlike the artist's garret that he had previously stated was his appropriate and acceptable domicile.

Joyfully enough, the idea of making money off of a business dovetails nicely with one of the FLGS's important users -

- the Consumer. Oh, blessed be the consumer. He visits the FLGS to buy games and sees no conflict of interest in that the retailer desires to sell him those same games. He has no expectation that, and would be quite shocked if, as he walked up to the front counter to make his purchase of precious games, he heard a strength-sapped voice call from the office, "I'll be right up as soon as I finish my bowl of gruel, sir. No, no I am quite all right, just a trifle lightheaded from hunger . . . yet how can I help but be happy here when I am surrounded by all these wonderful games?" Retailer and consumer -- truly a symbiotic relationship. One has what the other is willing to pay for.

But the retailer (now reformed of his burdensome idealism) loathes the Locust, that pseudo-consumer who treats the FLGS as a showroom for online discounters; a shameful practice that none of you, my lovelies, would ever engage in. The Locust trods our sacred aisles riffling through books with Cheetos-stained fingers, tossing miniatures blisters about with disdain, and asking difficult questions which require intensive research and then rewards the retailer by carrying only one small item to the counter.

"The MSRP is $14.95. I can get it online for only $7.00. What do you say?"

"But that is less than what I paid for it," moans the hapless retailer.

"What? You wish to make money from selling games, my good man? Outrageous."

And if the Reformed Retailer is unwary and he feels the prick of the Locust's scorn, he might find himself bowing low (scraping his forehead in the process). "You are, of course, correct." He wrings his hands. "$7.00 is a completely reasonable price even though it means I will not be able to feed my 12 wee ones this week. But what is that compared to suffering for our art?"

The Locust is satisfied. He has made a deal and once again proven his shopping virility. Except that next time he visits his FLGS, the windows are boarded over, dust lies on empty racks, tumbleweeds bounce across the cracked paving of the parking lot and, if he listens carefully, he might hear Sergio Leone spaghetti western music whistling in the distance. When he asks around, he is told that the retailer went into the poor house with his darling wife and 12 wee ones following close behind.

Locusts are few and far between. Mostly retailers see Consumers and Gamers. Gamers demand that a FLGS offer not just a game room but a whole schedule of events, tournaments, artist signings, and demonstrations to go along with that play space. In this, they are often joined by game publishers who are also undeniable users of the retail space though they may never set foot in your FLGS -- whose product do you really see sitting on those shelves? So speaking of publishers, I can and will digress.

The way a retailer does things is that, in general, he figures out which product lines should sell and then he displays them in an inviting manner (called merchandising) so that you, the customer, will feel an irresistible urge to buy, buy, buy. Quite honestly, while a retailer will confess to favoring certain games, he doesn't really care which items out of the bajillion that he displays you decide to purchase. He makes his money off of any them. But publishers care -- they care very deeply -- which item sells, because they only get their money if the retailer specifically buys and then sells (to you) their games. Each publisher feels that every retailer should hand-sell each of their games in a loving and earnest manner, placing them in the very best spot for display in the store, and they can become quite irate if the retailer does not go far and beyond the call of duty. They are often full of sometimes helpful ideas on the proper methods to be used to sell these games, including devoting X amount of play space to tournaments promoting their games. Once more than two or five or five hundred publishers all demand this extra effort from our favorite retailer, he can become just a bit frazzled. Wizards of the Coast has been known to make play space a requirement before the company will give "premier" status to a store. Premier status is needed if your FLGS wants to buy direct from Wizards of the Coast at slightly more favorable terms than it can obtain through a game distributor. Gamers and publishers are in one accord -- give us your play space and we will make it ours.

Back to our gamers. Here is where most game shops do define themselves. Not all gamers find it conducive to play games at their FLGS. Many of them are older with families and with a high degree of disposable income. Their venues of choice for play time are often their own homes or more upscale spaces, such as a coffee house or a book store. Very often the group of gamers who uses the game room is comprised of the ones escaping a roommate or a parental

situation, or where the FLGS can provide special tables, terrain or equipment that promotes play within the store. Once again, when the relationship is working, both the retailer and the Gamer are quite happy. But there are so many ways in which it can go wrong -- mainly when gamers stop buying product at the store but continue to feel entitled to playing at the store. Then the retailer is simply providing free play space to loiterers. That's a harsh statement, I know, but also apt.

Loiterers can become a financial disaster for most retailers. They love to tell their friends where they can find the best deals for games by buying online. They have no issues with tearing down the retailer or insulting their FLGS as they are using it. Somewhere along the way, they decided that their FLGS was a quasi-public space and they feel entitled to it.

"But I am an Alpha Gamer, my dear sir. If you dare to impose any rules upon my conduct while I am in your establishment, I shall tell all my friends, of which I have many, not to patronize your business. And they shall tell their friends and their friends and their friends. You do not want to make me your enemy."

"But what does it matter if you tell your friends to play elsewhere? You are already telling them where to buy elsewhere."

If a Loiterer is left unchecked, he can do great damage to a FLGS, in essence harming the store that he started out loving.

Nearly all of these users -- Consumer, publisher, gamer -- can live in happy cooperation if they understand that the retailer needs to run their FLGS as a business and that they need to share. There is no entitlement, no quasi-public space but simply one person running a business profitably by trying to make as many of his customers happy as possible. The retailer needs to make money if the FLGS is to stay open for many years.

So when you love your FLGS just don't love it to death. Learn to share . . . and while you are at it, buy a game once in a while.

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Review

Relationship Tightrope

Published by Uberplay

Designed by Reiner Knizia

Art by Alvin Madden

61 cards (nine relationship, two instant forgiveness, 50 bidding), 50 balancing sticks (25 each of blue and pink), & rulebook; three to five players, full-color, boxed; $19.95

Ah, romance. Flowery. Delightful. Fulfilling. A lethal minefield. Make one wrong move and you find yourself listening to Bob Dylan albums and gorging yourself on junk food. The trick lies in making sure you're no more or less annoying than your partner in learning to navigate the *Relationship Tightrope.*

The object of the game is to have the most balanced relationship by the end of the game, represented by the lowest score.

The game is played over as many rounds as there are players, so for example with three players there are three rounds. (It would seem poetic that a game like this would be played with partners or couples, but it's for three to five players, so that torpedoes that theory.) Everyone is dealt nine bidding cards (valued one through 50), and the relationship deck is placed in the middle of the table, along with a pile of pink and blue balancing sticks.

The dealer goes first, and flips over the top relationship card. The upper half of each has the man's sin in blue; at the bottom, the woman's transgression appears in pink. He plays golf or forgets an anniversary, and she can't kill a spider or bother to tell him her mother's coming to visit. Their offenses are matched (well, maybe they aren't, but you can take that up with Reiner Knizia) so that both have the same point value. There are two instant forgiveness cards, one for him and one for her, worth zero points (the gesture is so nice, the giver can do no wrong that turn). When drawn, they are paired up with a regular relationship card. For example, if his forgiveness card is pulled it's used to cover the upper half of the normal card, making his half of the card worth zero while hers remains at the printed value.

The dealer plays a bid card face up, then the player on his left, and so on (giving the last player a distinct advantage). Whoever bids the most gets the card's value in blue balancing sticks. The low bid gets pink sticks. Anyone in the middle gets nothing. Subsequently that high bidder flips the next relationship card and makes the first offer. As you get balancing sticks, you discard pairs. If you got three blue sticks from the last auction and you get the low score this time on the five card, three of your pink sticks match up with the three blues and are discarded, leaving you with two pink sticks. After nine rounds, your unpaired sticks are tallied and written down.

Now the player to the left of the original dealer shuffles and deals the cards anew, and those nine cards are played. If you manage a score of zero at the end of a later round, you may erase your highest score from a previous round. When everyone's had a turn as dealer, all the scores are tallied and the lowest total shows you know how best to balance your loving relationship. And since variety adds spice to anything, they also suggest playing only with those cards that equate to the number of players times nine (i.e., with three players, play with bid cards one through 27), or keeping the bids secret to level the playing field between those who would otherwise reveal their cards first or last.

While the cards are good material, and the illustrations they sport show both talent and an understanding of male/female relationships, they do feel oddly as though you've got two cards in your hand. (You'll find yourself rubbing them between thumb and forefinger to assure yourself you haven't drawn too many.) And according to rules

set down by our forefathers, the sticks are exactly that -- pieces of wood, fit for balancing relationships or starting romantic fires.

In an effort to distinguish themselves from other offerings in the market, trick-taking games have a tendency to get awfully cute with their mechanics, but this usually means more to think about and not a more entertaining game. *Relationship Tightrope* has the interconnected, well . . . *relationships* among its component processes to make it an absorbing idea, but it's simple enough to produce an approachable pastime. You never feel at the mercy of random draws and plays, but start -- and remain -- in control of your game.

Uberplay's rules are the good kind -- you'll read them through once, check them as you play your first round, and then never look at them again. Players are challenged by their opponents, not their rules memorization (though if you can keep track of what everyone has played, more power to you). Play is casual enough that you can keep up a constant stream of conversation with your fellow romantics and get up to refill everyone's drinks without tripping yourself up. And with harmony like that, you'll fall in love all over again . . . with gaming, anyway.

--Andy Vetromile

'Til Death Do Us Part . . . Now Define "Death"

for *GURPS*

by Eric Funk

"I wonder what it's like to be inside your head, behind your face."
--*Lost in Space* theme

Jack Farthington was a promising young magical researcher specializing in illusion and far-sensing. He grew up in the city, and has always been fascinated by the mechanics of magic, even to the point of learning the basics of Thaumatology through books in his local library. Being a bookworm, his social skills are lacking. He made few professional connections while he was a student, and was later surprised to learn how many friends he had made.

Carla was a mage of minor power who likes people and animals. Her family lives in the suburbs, long-time practitioners of weather-harnessing nature magic. She is not that interested in the inner workings of magic, but studies its effects on society. At college, she affirmed her disinterest in her family's traditional college, and instead followed her dreams. This, too, was a bit unrealistic, but it all changed one day.

They met in college, sharing hobbies and a few classes. Soon they discovered themselves taking elective classes in each other's majors. Finally, they realized they were in love. After graduating from basic studies, they were married, and life continued. Together, they played musical instruments, performed research, and played roleplaying games.

It all changed with an experiment gone wrong. During extracurricular studies between school years, a nearby lab's project went out of control and caused a chain reaction. When Carla regained consciousness in a hospital, she was shocked to learn that when the smoke had cleared, Jack was gone! His body was not among rubble. Their colleagues were stumped by his disappearance. Even mediums were unable to contact his spirit in the beyond. After a time, Carla was contemplating suicide from heartbreak. Just at that moment, Jack appeared to her, explaining that he is somehow trapped in her mind.

It seems that Jack is now living in her head. He can use magic spells as per normal rules, and those he knows at level 20 or higher can be activated instantly. In low-mana zones, Jack cannot maintain the Phantom for long, but can use lesser illusions. In a No Mana Zone, Jack is almost completely isolated, and if not allowed a time-share of the body (likely in a private area), will soon become paranoid and introverted. They are currently seeking a temporary fix with a combination Soul Jar plus Golem (perhaps using a variant of Simulacrum or Doppelganger). Jack uses Wizard Eye and Phantom to create an image that can interact. While he normally uses her sensory input, he can choose not to use all the senses if, for instance, if she enters a perfume shop.

Jack can help in any situation where it helps being a hologram -- no life signs, body heat, breathing, weight, or the like. Since his image is not technically a person, it will not set off most traps. He is also handy to have around for helping in hazardous areas -- he is essentially a hologram (albeit with DR10 to 15, DX 20, ST 20 or 40; see p. M97 and also Spirit Hologram, p. TM49). That level of DR makes him immune to ordinary flame (1d-1, see p. B433), and his DR can be even higher if the Phantom spell is cast Ceremonially. Essentially, any adventure where one could benefit from a sometimes-insubstantial ghost to watch one's back, listen to conversations after one leaves the room, and so on. At night, Carla and the body can sleep while Jack reads using magic.

Adventure Seeds

Revenge of The Exorcist

Carla comes to the party and needs assistance. A voodoo shaman is trying to "help" her by exorcising the spirit that is

"haunting" her: Jack. The heroes must confront the shaman and convince him that the spirit is not malignant. (Perhaps Carla's family hired him . . .)

For added spice:

- What if, after the heroes have gotten this straightened out, someone independently starts wreaking havoc with illusions . . . much to Jack's detriment.
- Alternately, the party is first hired to get rid of Jack, and then discover he is benign. They are only told that he is a ghost, a stalker pretending to be him, or something else.
- Combining these two complications, what if both occur and the adventurers must sort out the confusion of a rampant spectre that *looks* like Jack. The simulation might be such that even Carla can't visually distinguish the illusions apart.

The Show Mustn't Go On

While "teaching a brute a lesson," Jack impresses a noble. Although Jack can interact in courtly situations, the illusion cannot be relied upon to shake hands or maintain other physical contact, so the heroes must come along. This is a good opportunity for them to climb the social ladder.

For added spice:

- The "brute" was a popular sports competitor who has been dishonored. The heroes are needed to help take his place and protect everybody from the poor sport.
- Jack and Carla are entertainers on the side using *semi-solid* illusions. They need the money to help someone, but now the illusion can't go on.

Letting Go

A visiting researcher has been studying Carla and Jack, for reasons they aren't entirely sure about. Recently, the couple has had an ever-growing suspicion that he is hiding something. They are unable to make progress, so they turn to the adventurers to determine what is going on.

For added spice:

- The heroes discover that the researcher believes he may have a sure-fire cure, but he will not release it; Carla and Jack are too fascinating a case, and he doesn't want to lose the opportunity to study the situation some more. (In this case, the researcher believes it is easier to undo that recreate.)
- Although the researcher seems willing to help separate Jack and Carla, when the time approaches to undo the problem he holds out, insisting they do "one last job" for him which requires their powers . . .

A World of Good

The research shows that Jack's body *does* still exist, but in another world/time. With this option, the opportunity exists to have a disturbing complication: In this alternate dimension, both may be in *his* body. They are currently studying this phenomenon with the goal of moving completely to either location.

The PCs are hired to find a certain spell ingredient/formula/item that will help separate Jack or rematerialize his body. This could be a MacGuffin to send the PCs to another dimension or world, or to travel to an unfriendly location. It might involve a trip involving a magic-dead area, through which the couple would be reluctant to travel.

Variation: Magic School Adventures

As presented, the characters are low-level graduate students with some connections and skills. To make them

beginning students in a moderate power game, just remove half their skills and spells. On the flip side, they could easily become teachers with the addition of some protection spells!

Carla Farthington (née Alstair)   125 points

Description: Human female, 5'9", ~160 lbs, mid-20s, shoulder-length strawberry blonde hair.

ST 9 [-10]; *IQ* 12 [40]; *DX* 10 [0]; *HT* 11 [10].

Damage 1d-2 thr 1d-1 sw; BL 16; HP 9
Will 14 [10]; Per 10 [-10]; FP 14 [9]
Speed 5.25; Move 5; Dodge 8.

Advantages: Ally (Jack, Constantly)[20]; Animal Empathy [5]; Attractive [5]; Charisma +1 [5]; Honest Face [1]; Magery 2 [25]; Pitiable [5].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Scientist) [-5]; Dependant (Jack, Loved One, Constantly) [-8]; Duty (School, Always) [-15]; Obsession (Be bodily reunited with Jack) (12) [-10]; Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10]; Reputation (-2, "split personality," Small Class, 7) [-1]; Sense of Duty (Family, friends) [-5]; Xenophilia (12) [-10].

Quirks: Collects Illusion-scapes with scenes from far-away places; likes to draw; dislikes places with less than Normal Mana; dreamer

Skills: Administration-11 (IQ-1 A) [1]; Area Knowledge (City)-12 (IQ E) [1]; Connoisseur (Magic)-11 (IQ-1 A) [1]; Current Affairs (Pop Culture)-12 (IQ E) [1]; Diplomacy-12 (IQ*,** H) [1]; Dreaming-12 (Will-2 H) [1]; First Aid-12 (IQ E) [1]; Hazardous Materials (Magic)-11 (IQ-1 A) [1]; Hiking-9 (HT-1 A) [1]; Hobby Skill (Games, various)-12 (IQ E) [1]; Lip Reading-11 (Per+1 A) [4]; Literature-10 (IQ-2 H) [1]; Musical Instrument (Flute)-11 (IQ-2 H) [1]; Naturalist-10 (IQ-2 H) [1]; Philosophy (Local Mage Guild)-10 (IQ-2 H) [1]; Professional Skill (Research Mage)-12 (IQ A) [2]; Public Speaking-13 (IQ+1*,** A) [1]; Research-12 (IQ A) [2]; Savoir-Faire-14 (IQ+2*,** E) [1]; Sociology (Magical Influence)-12/10 (IQ-1 H) [2]; Staff-9 (DX-1 A) [1]; Swimming-10 (DX E) [1]; Teaching-15 (IQ*,** A) [2]; Thaumatology-12 (IQ*** V) [4]; Writing-11 (IQ A) [1].

* Includes +1 for Appearance
** Includes +1 for Charisma
*** Includes +2 for Magery

Note: +2 from Bless not included in skills or spells.)

Spells:

Specific: Major Healing-13 (V) [4]; Recover Energy-15 [4].

Generic (-12 [1] each): Analyze Magic; Apportation; Aura; Beast Soother; Beast Speech; Colors; Copy; Dancing Object; Detect Magic; Dye; Find Weakness; Identify Spell; Lend Energy; Lend Vitality; Light; Master; Minor Healing; Musical Scribe; Recover Energy; Restore; Scribe; Seek Magic; Sound; Stop Bleeding; Voice; WallWalk.

Jack Farthington   125 points

Typical Appearance: human male, ht 5'11, wt 170 lbs, age mid-20s, dark red hair (almost black) clean-shaven
Alternate Appearance: "familiar": black cat with white paws (white feathery wings optional).

ST 20 Phantom (*ST* 40 in parentheses); *DX* 20 Phantom; *IQ* 16 [120]; *DR* 10 (average, see Phantom, p. M97).

Will 14 [-10]; Per 12 [-20]; FP 14
Speed 5; Dodge 8; Move 5 (Illusion Speed).

BL 80 (320)

Max lift: 800 lbs (3,200 lbs)

Damage*:

Punch w/brass or shield bash: 2d (cr) C (4d (cr) C)
Large Cat 2d+1 (imp) C,1 (4d+5 (imp) C,1)
Broadsword 3d+3 (cut) C,1 (7d (cut) C,1)

* Requires a living creature to fail a contest, see p. M97.

Advantages: Ally (Carla, Constantly) [20]; Autotrance [1]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Deep Sleeper [1]; Magery 4 [45]; Serendipity 1 [15].

Disadvantages:

"Racial": Dependency (Rare: Carla, Constant) [-150].

"Personal": Dependant (Carla, Loved One, Constantly) [-8]; Duty (School, Always) [-5]; Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10]; Phobia (No Mana Zone, 12) [-10]; Quirks (Enjoys arm-wrestling brutes who poke fun at "wimpy" mages; enjoys reading; hates to see books damaged; overconfident; hates "human" maintenance) [-5]; Sense of Duty (Family, friends) [-5]; Xenophilia (9) [extra -5].

Skills: Acting-15 (IQ-1 A) [1]; Area Knowledge (City)-16 (IQ E) [1]; Artist (Illusion)-15 (IQ-1 H) [2]; Broadsword-19 (DX-1 A) [1]; Connoisseur (Magic)-15 (IQ-1 A) [1]; Current Affairs (Magical Research)-16 (IQ E) [1]; Disguise-15 (IQ-1 A) [1]; First Aid-16 (IQ E) [1]; Forensics (Magic)-14 (IQ-2 H) [1]; Hazardous Materials (Magic)-15 (IQ-1 A) [1]; Hobby Skill (Games, various)-16 (IQ E) [1]; Innate Attack-19 (DX-1 A) [1]; Lip Reading-13 (Per+1 A) [4]; Meditation-14 (Will-1 H) [4]; Musical Instrument (Flute)-14 (IQ-2 H) [1]; Philosophy (Local Magic Guild)-14 (IQ-2 H) [1]; Professional Skill (Research Mage)-15 (IQ-1 A) [1]; Research-17 (IQ+1 A) [4]; Shield-19 (DX-1 A) [1]; Staff-19 (DX A) [1]; Swimming-20 (DX E) [1]; Teaching-15 (IQ-1 A) [1]; Thaumatology-19 (IQ+3* V) [4]; Traps/TL-15 (IQ-1 A) [1]; Ventriloquism-15 (IQ-1 A) [1].

* Includes +4 for Magery

(+2 from Bless not included in skills or spells)

Note that DX use of skills can use Carla's DX of 10 or the Phantom's DX of 20 depending on whether he's using her body to perform the action or not.

Spells:

Specific: Far-Hearing-20 [4]; Phantom-20 (V) [8]; Recover Energy-20 [4]; Wizard Eye-20 [4].

Generic (-18 [1] each): Analyze Magic; Apportation; Bless; Complex Illusion; Detect Magic; Haste; Hinder; Hush; Identify Spell; Ignite Fire; Keen Hearing; Keen Vision; Lend Vitality; Light; Mage Sight; Mage-Stealth; Perfect Illusion; Recover Energy; Seek Earth; Silence; Simple Illusion; Sound; Stop Bleeding; Telecast; Teleport.

Equipment: They are currently renting a 100-sf Lab (see p. M211), and own a small variety of powerstones (at least 5 × 1pt, 2 × 2pt and one 3pt).

Variants

Evolution

This duo might serve as starting characters at 125 points each, with 25 more to expand (+37cp -12cp). Carla is a balanced character, but Jack is not. With real world exposure, the pair will increase Contacts, Perception, and Will quickly.

In Danger Again . . .

What if Jack can only manifest when Carla is in danger? She may begin to place herself in hazardous situations just to see him. In this scenario, she tags along with the PCs (or is hired for the same mission as them) and she seems to be On The Edge [-15*] (p. B146).

No One Here By That Name . . .

In a setting where Jack is legally dead, add Delusion ("Jack is Alive") [-10] to Carla, and the advantage Zeroed [10] to Jack. Even if he is "alive," he might be classified as a Second-Class Citizen, like one of the undead. In fact, he may even have difficulty proving that he *exists,* and is not the product of the overactive imagination of her obsession over a registered mage. In a secret magic/power campaign, they have little hope of proving his continuance. Only reversing the process could

Variant Settings

Horror

There is always the possibility that it is not Jack, but a parasite/symbiant (see *Pyramid* article ["Ashes of Her Ladyship"](#)) that is reading off her memories.

IOU/Supers

They can be a super team! She's the mage and he's the Brick . . .

Raising his level with the Phantom spell to 30, Jack can sustain a DR20, DX30, ST 60 Phantom indefinitely! (Who would suspect that Superman is actually mild-mannered Lois Lane?) In a pure IOU campaign, the student/teacher ideas may work well, although Mundanes may make dynamic illusions tricky to set up. Alternately, the presence of a seemingly black box or a flickering effect may allow it to pass as a holographic effect.

Transhuman Space

As a Shadow/Ghost, they are less likely to "suddenly" appear as an accident, but it is possible if Jake is thought dead and lost, and is brainpeeled by an ally while Carla is out of contact. It's not *that* unusual of a character, if one considers "shadow swapping" (See *Transhuman Space: Deep Beyond,* p. 88). Using Augmented Reality, he could actually have a "hologram" that appears to interact with people!

Space

This idea is similar to the ***Transhuman Space*** plot seed, but Jack uses holograph projectors to make appearances. If there is sufficient superscience, they might even be solid!

Spirits

Perhaps she (or his/her wedding ring) is the anchor (see "Anchor/Place of Power," pp. SPI 29,35). In this scenario, he is a different character with a separate Fatigue score. Her observance of his continuance is enough so he does not need to roll to stay on this plane. However, things could get very complicated if she were to be knocked unconscious for days . . .

Voodoo

Perhaps the entity now calling itself Jack only has his memories, or what she thinks are his memories . . . and can possess her, as per Spirit Warrior!

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External Link

- Motives for Spying by Wiki

The Lovelorn Gaze Of Lady Lytton

A Tale of Cupid & Psycho

by Michael Anguiano

Lady Lytton is a creature of sublime beauty and exotic charms, who has bewitched the eye of every man in the kingdom. Her husband, Lord Lytton, is known to be a fierce warrior, but she nevertheless has her share of admiring courtiers as well as jealous would-be rivals. Indeed, rumors abound in the court that she has a courtly love who is devoted to her, body and soul. That someone would fall so deeply in love with her is not surprising, but that she would return the sentiment is the stuff of mythic romance. That lucky man is the envy of many, despite the danger of discovery by her husband.

The odd part is . . . it's you.

Hopefully, you'll figure it out before Lord Lytton does.

(This scenario is not meant as a stand-alone, but rather as an entangling background situation that can be integrated into almost any standing fantasy campaign, facilitating a variety of options for roleplaying, adventure, and humor. It only needs a male PC; Lady Lytton will supply the rest.)

Background Information

What Everybody Knows

The handsome and dashing Lord Raramund Otho Corvallis Lytton comes from a large and well-respected line of nobility -- the House of Corvallis -- which has provided him with a large measure of his wealth. However, his title, lands, and manorial estate were a grant from the king, in recognition of his great and invaluable service to the empire. Indeed, Lord Lytton is widely regarded as a hero, both for his military victories and for his personal adventures. In particular, his swordsmanship is known to be, quite literally, second to none.

Two years ago, the Marquessa Sasskia Cervenka arrived from her remote homeland with only her handmaiden Mariska, a coachful of luggage, and a trunk full of books in her native language. Two short days and one highly orchestrated ceremony later, she became the Lady Lytton, thereby cementing an alliance of interests between the powerful House of Corvallis and the distant Cervenka Dynasty. Lytton Manor, situated just outside the capitol city and a stone's throw from the palace, is thus a focal point of growing economic and political power.

Pity that no one really lives there. The sprawling estate is typically kept up by a few trusted servants and only rarely occupied by the Lady Lytton, with Lord Lytton an even rarer guest. An inveterate traveler, he spends the vast majority of his time abroad, usually engaged in one adventure or another. His visits home are few and short.

As a consequence of her husband's absence, Lady Lytton passes most of her days as a guest of the palace, where she has become a fixture at the royal court and a figure much admired, at least by the men. Her foreign blood, exotic looks, and curious ways have turned many a head. Her native language has a musical lilt to it, all the more so because nobody at court can speak it but she and her handmaiden. Even her incomplete grasp of the language is charming, probably because her accent is so cute. At least, that's what the men think.

The ladies of the court, and of high society in general, are somewhat less enthusiastic in their evaluation of her. She is scorned most jealously (if privately) and more than a few would delight to see her humbled and humiliated. Many slanderous rumors have been circulated about her, but she remains aloof from such things.

The Lady

Lady Sasskia Cervenka Lytton is like a new kitten: adorable, self-absorbed, and not very bright. She is astonishingly beautiful, especially in conjunction with her distinctly exotic looks, and has a natural grace. She is also very sweet-natured, with little of the arrogance that might be expected of one born with great beauty as well as great social advantage. However, she is still quite young and remains a bit immature, so that her world revolves around her . . . and she assumes that everyone else's does, too.

Lord Lytton is evidently not of the same opinion.

This has left Lady Lytton a very lonely woman. Her family and friends are far away, her husband is far away, and she has little real company except for Mariska. While Mariska has picked up the language quickly and has no difficulty communicating, Lady Lytton herself has become discouraged and makes little effort to improve her grasp of the language. Mariska has thus become the primary conduit through which she communicates with others.

Mariska, unfortunately, is enjoying the situation immensely. This has given her an opportunity to manipulate the woman to whom she has been a servant since their childhood. It has also given her an opportunity to line her own pockets at the expense of Lady Lytton's would-be suitors, as well as carry off a few discreet affairs of her own.

In her private moments, Lady Lytton reads. Her personal library is a trunk full of books in her native language, all of them "classical" tales of courtly romance and tragic love.

In short, Lady Lytton is ready to fall in love. More to the point, Lady Lytton is ready to fall into what she thinks is love.

Her Husband

Lord Raramond Lytton is the very picture of a dashing adventurer and chivalrous knight. His manners and bearing are impeccable, as befits a child of nobility. His humble and unassuming demeanor of *noblesse oblige* makes him an appealing popular figure. His tactical skills are considerable and he is a bold military leader, much admired by his men. His bravery and courage are beyond question. His swordsmanship is nothing short of legendary.

He is also as dense as a plank. Much of the problem is not just that he's clueless, but that he's clueless about being clueless.

His lack-of-clue has remained a well-kept secret. Initially, it was the efforts of his family to shield him from others and from possible ridicule, if only for the sake of protecting their own reputations. His pursuit of a military career made this more difficult, since the family could no longer closely regulate his contact with others, but this problem soon took care of itself because of the loyalty and admiration he inspires. Soon, his aides and associates found themselves shielding him from others and from possible ridicule.

Indeed, while some would grumble that his military victories are largely a matter of unbelievable luck, the rank-and-file under his command tolerate no bad-mouthing of their beloved leader, who had often risked his own life in personally leading an attack that others might consider foolhardy.

After leaving the military, Lord Lytton found himself drawn to adventures in foreign lands. During one such adventure, he came to the attention of his wife-to-be's family after a heroic battle in the snows of a high mountain pass. With only the barest assistance, Lord Lytton managed to defend a vulnerable peasant village while inflicting scores of casualties on the attacking horde of brigands. As usual. In this instance, however, the pass proved to be a key point in an intended invasion, which was effectively foiled by Lord Lytton's defense. The brigands were hired mercenaries who were to pave the way for a following army, which would have moved through in the springtime to flank the unprepared home forces. So through his bravery and swordsmanship (and, perhaps, unbelievable luck), Lord Lytton saved a kingdom and earned the admiration and attention of that land's most powerful noble house, the Cervenka Dynasty. The House of Corvallis was quickly contacted, a marriage was arranged, and the rest is recent

history.

Lord Lytton himself is rather indifferent to the whole thing. Fame, wealth, and the like are simply a byproduct of his love of adventure and travel.

It's not that he doesn't love his wife, he just doesn't really notice her. He tends to view her as simply one of the accoutrements of a gentleman's life: an estate, a military commission, a wife, etc. Of course, he would never be unfaithful to her because he is a man of honor and principle. Accordingly, should he discover that some blackguard has compromised his wife's honor and brought shame to the House of Corvallis, he would be forced to take most strenuous and appropriate action to redress the grievance.

In short, Lord Lytton would challenge her paramour to a duel.

To the death.

And Lord Lytton would win.

Her Lover

That would be you.

You caught the eye of Lady Lytton while you were briefly on the palace grounds some months ago, and she was quite impressed by your handsome looks and fearless demeanor. She also was rather flattered that you so carefully avoided meeting her eyes, which she took as a sign of your interest. What won her heart, though, was how you loved her despite the many risks, should Lord Lytton find out . . .

You lucky duck.

The Scenario

The Set-Up

The PCs are engaged by one of the ministers at court to recover some stolen goods. The minister explains that a woman on the palace household staff recently absconded with a number of items taken from royal guests. The suspected thief has traveled to the nearby residence of a bandit leader of great reputation, presumably to fence the stolen goods outside of the immediate jurisdiction. The guests are currently being stalled with a variety of lame excuses, so time and discretion are of the essence. Consequently, the minister has chosen to engage the heroes to recover the items, rather than send a contingent of the Royal Guard, which he explains would take more time and draw more attention. The minister will not give further explanations of his reasoning or of the incident, nor will he give an itemized list of the stolen goods. He insists that the PCs will be well-paid for their efforts and their discretion (with implicit penalties should they fail in either regard).

In truth, the minister doesn't really know what was stolen. He only knows that his own wife has stupidly engineered a scandal and he is desperate to head off the consequences. His wife arranged for some goods to be "stolen," which would be subsequently discovered in the bedchambers of Lady Lytton who, it would surely be assumed, was an unprincipled harlot. Apparently the items were then stolen, for real, from Lady Lytton's chambers by a young housemaid who subsequently fled the city. Upon further investigation, the minister has learned that the housemaid is a close relation to the nearby bandit leader, leading him to the conclusion that she had escaped to the relative safety of his stronghold.

(Actually, Mariska found the stolen items in Lady Lytton's chambers first and suspected what was up. Acting quickly, Mariska simply cornered the gullible maid and convinced her that if she didn't flee to her bandit cousin, she would be turned in as a thief and executed.)

The bandit leader's reputation is undeserved, as the heroes will learn. With only moderate difficulty, the adventurers defeat the bandit group and recover their booty, among which are a number of obviously valuable knickknacks, presumably stolen from the palace. Among these particular items are a lady's fan, superbly constructed of ivory and silk, decorated in gold thread with obscurely foreign designs. The fan is a quite distinct item, probably the most valuable of the stolen goods. Any party member with experience at court might recognize that it belongs to Lady Lytton.

(Mariska had thrown Lady Lytton's fan in with the rest of the "stolen" goods, knowing that Lady Lytton would be heartbroken by the loss of this prized memento.)

The bandits are only a moderate threat and the heroes should succeed in defeating them and recovering their loot.

The PCs have three options at this point:

1. keep all the booty and hoof it, soon to be chased across the countryside by large companies of Royal Guard;
2. return all of the various knickknacks to the minister, who will pay the heroes very handsomely and then have everything returned as diplomatically as possible;
3. return only some of the various knickknacks to the minister, who will pay the heroes very handsomely and then have everything returned as diplomatically as possible.

If the party chooses to return some or all of the items, Lady Lytton will see them at some point when they visit the palace to meet with the minister. If the heroes choose to return Lady Lytton's fan, she will inadvertently witness them handing it over. If they keep the fan, she will see them from a distance and Mariska will take to opportunity to point one of the heroes out as the one responsible for stealing the fan. Lady Lytton will immediately assume that the fan was taken and kept out of romantic longing.

At this point, Lady Lytton will become smitten with whichever PC most deserves the punishment.

And They're Off!

From here, the GM can use Lady Lytton, Mariska, and the royal court as springboards for a variety of scenarios.

Most obviously, the PCs can become regular employees of the minister who initially hired them, who would find them a useful alternative to official actions of the Royal Guard. This could involve aboveboard jobs like finding stolen goods or cracking down on the Thieves' Guild. Or, less openly, the minister could have them steal documents from court rivals, raid the caravans of uncooperative business interests, or discreetly handle a potentially scandalous situation involving a royal nephew.

Alternately, any adventurer with significant social standing can become a fixture at the royal court, where the GM can use courtly politics for any number of diplomacy scenarios.

Lastly, the PCs could simply pass before the palace on a regular basis on the course of their adventures.

In any case, the eyes of the Lady Lytton will be on her beloved . . . whichever hero that happens to be. Others at court will begin to notice that Lady Lytton is more distracted than usual and soon the speculation will begin. Soon, the court will be gossiping that Lady Lytton is in the throes of a courtly romance, surely to have a tragic end once her husband finds out . . .

Mariska, of course, will manipulate the speculation for her own amusement, but initially she has no idea with whom Lady Lytton is smitten.

This should play out over time. Lady Lytton should be merely a background figure for at least an adventure or two before the effects of her infatuation would be felt at court. After that point, the GM can have the speculation become widespread, so the targeted PC is aware of it but nobody yet has an idea who her beloved is.

On the other hand, the GM could have the hero be completely unaware of the speculation, even as the court (with Mariska's help) begins to see the PC as her chivalric suitor; consequently, he finds himself the object of increasing attention from a larger and larger circle of influential people (all of whom think they have something to gain from the situation). Of course, other would-be suitors of the Lady Lytton will take a dim view of the hero's reputed intentions, leading to seemingly unmotivated confrontations. Conversely, other would-be rivals of Lady Lytton would see opportunities as well, leading to seemingly unmotivated seductions . . .

Either way, this situation can be stretched out for quite some time. Eventually, however, someone will act on this unresolved infatuation. Hopefully, the heroes will act to resolve the situation. An ethical PC will try to clear up the confusion, which will only increase the speculation and certainly won't convince Lady Lytton (who will see denials as affirmations). An unscrupulous PC will try to seduce Lady Lytton, which will lead to full-blown obsession on her part, with unfortunate consequences for everyone. A slightly more cunning but still unscrupulous adventurer will try to seduce Mariska, who gains much from manipulating the speculation but will gain nothing if the speculation is confirmed in one direction or the other, and so who will aid and abet the PC in any endeavor that will maintain her status quo.

If the PCs don't act to resolve this, then it is up to the GM to bring on the endgame: Lord Lytton will return home.

Finishing It

With Lord Lytton's return, the heroes now face a suddenly narrowed field of options:

1. run;
2. act casual; or
3. stand and fight.

Simply explaining the truth to Lord Lytton himself is not an option, because they simply won't be able to get through the protective circle of friends and advisors who shield him from common contact.

If the heroes run, then the speculation and gossip will soon reach those who protect Lord Lytton from himself. However, Lord Lytton will hear little and understand less, until Lady Lytton has a fainting spell at court. She will then be bedridden, stricken ill that her beloved had to flee. Lord Lytton will, with help, put two and two together. He will then pursue the adventurers, accompanied by several trusted family retainers and closely followed by a couple dozen noblemen who are making bets on how quickly the duel will end (since they have no doubt about the outcome). The GM must determine what sort of fast-talk, begging, or fake death would be sufficient to placate Lord Lytton, who will catch up to the alleged beloved PC sooner or later. Of course, that pursuit could be several adventures as well.

If the heroes simply act casual, then the speculation and gossip will soon reach those who protect Lord Lytton from himself. The PCs will then find themselves hired at an outrageously high wage for an immediate job that requires them to leave the country. The employer, of course, will be Lord Lytton's family. In their absence, Lady Lytton will pine away for a while but, eventually, she recovers to love again. This option allows the heroes to escape intact, while also giving the GM an opportunity to completely change campaign settings.

If they decide to stand and fight, they must decide if they will face Lord Lytton with honor. If so, then Lord Lytton will only challenge the PC with whom the Lady Lytton had become smitten. Lady Lytton, of course, will be overcome with tearful declarations of love. Lord Lytton and the PC will cross swords at dawn, and the hero will be stone dead at dawn plus one minute. If the other PCs are able to raise or resurrect their dead comrade, they should remove the body to a safe location first; Lord Lytton hates to have to kill someone twice, so he'd kill the rest of them as well to make sure. Lady Lytton, of course, will pine away for a while but, eventually, she recovers to love again.

If the PCs decide to fight Lord Lytton without honor, then they must decide whether to conduct an open assault or attempt an assassination. Either way, they fail. Any heroes who participated in the attack are severely wounded and taken into custody by the Royal Guard. Once in jail, the PCs are able to escape with some quiet assistance from an unidentified outside party (Mariska). Once out of jail, the PCs can try to flee the countryside. Lord Lytton, however,

will not join the pursuit, because now the heroes are enemies of the state and rightfully belong to the king's justice. To this end, several companies of Royal Guard will pursue the party until they are safely out of the country. Nevertheless, the heroes are advised to avoid crossing paths with Lord Lytton in the future.

(Scavenger) Hunting For Love

Welcome to our eleventy-jillionth Valentine's Day issue devoted to loooooove. This is my first post-marriage Valentine's Day, and I gotta say that it's pretty different approaching this whole holiday when you're wading in wedded bliss.

Unfortunately, this column might be a bit more devoid of gamerly-type information than normal, since we're about two hours from going out of town to visit my parents (the first post-wedding visit for my side of the family). And, frankly, I'm not sure I have much more inspiration for the world of Eros this time around that hasn't been covered in the half-dozen previous years. So, in a kind of "real world" trial, I thought I'd present what I did for my sweetie, as a kind of "Valentine's Day for Gamers."

The day started with a home-printed card for her in a handmade envelope on the door:

I Heart You!

(I shamelessly stole this idea from another site, but the resolution on their card wasn't high enough so I needed to pop in my own copy of *Indiana Jones and the Truth About Cats & Dogs* and work some computer software mojo.)

There was some mushy stuff inside, concluding with the heartfelt sentiment, "If you ever have the need to rip out any organs to further your dark goals, I'm sure it'll only be because you love me."

Technically, I get a bit ahead of myself. See, the previous day -- February 13th -- was our six-month anniversary (or the 0.05%-of-a-millennium anniversary, as I like to think of it). So I was trying to come up with an idea that would keep her occupied and thinking warm-and-fuzzy thoughts for me for the next 24 hours.

Unfortunately, it didn't work.

See, my idea was to send her a series of Mystery E-Mails, numbered #0 through #9, throughout the course of her day on the 13th. The #0 e-mail was designed to show her that the other nine e-mails were attached together tic-tac-toe style, creating a Sudoku grid. Unfortunately, since this was the first clue of the scavenger hunt, it was kind of important for it to be interpreted (more or less) correctly, rather than languishing in an inbox.

Anyway, never one to be undaunted by the grinning spectre of failure, I went ahead and printed out the fully assembled Sudoku puzzle for her to have when she got home.

Unfortunately, she didn't seem in the mood to try the puzzle at that time. "Will this give me something to do on the plane trip in a few days . . ." Since the resultant clue of the Sudoku puzzle -- that the next clue was hidden in the VCR -- wouldn't make a whole lot of sense at 20,000 feet, I decided to lay all my cards on the table. I told her that this was the first piece of a scavenger hunt, and that she was free to complete it whenever she wanted (or not to do it at all), but that the Valentine's festivities I'd planned were pretty much tied to the scavenger hunt. It was at this point that she seemed to get it, and proceeded to solve the puzzle. (Whether she was genuinely interested at this point, or merely did it to humor her husband, is a matter of debate among top scientists at MIT.) The Sudoku puzzle was a standard one swiped . . . errr, *adapted* from one found online from PrintSudoku.com. See, the trick with all scavenger hunts is that there needs to be a way of getting a clue that leads to the next clue; ideally, in the case of puzzles, it's best if the puzzle needs to be wholly (or at least mostly) completed before the next clue can be gleaned. Unfortunately, my beta-tester (a.k.a. The Missus) indicates that she was able to solve at least the first part of the Sudoku's revelation before finishing the rest of the puzzle. However, she was good enough to finish the puzzle before darting off to the next clue.

Anyway, the puzzle I adapted -- PDF page 4 (print page 2) of the Easy Book (solutions in a separate book) -- happened to have a the center row and the center column incomplete, making those ideal spots to hide clues. The solution of a standard Sudoku puzzle will be such that all numbers from one to nine will be used exactly once in any given nine-box row or column. As such, it's trivial to hide a message in there, by merely offering a key:

1 = A
2 = V
3 = G
4 = N
...
etc.

The interesting challenge here, then, is to come up with a nine-letter phrase where none of the letters repeat. (Technically the non-repetition isn't a requirement, since I could make a key where numbers represent the same letter. However, I considered a challenge to do so, since then -- in theory -- the Sudoku could be represented entirely by letters.)

In this case I colored the blank horizontal row blue and the vertical row red. I offered a key for the blue one with the puzzle; when completed, it spelled out:

GAZEINVCR

Or, "Gaze in VCR." (Yes, gaze isn't the most obvious word. As an exercise for the home reader, I challenge you to come up with a nine-letter phrase that indicates the person should look in the VCR for the next clue.)

Inside the slot of the used-once-in-a-blue-moon VCR was a cryptogram (no doubt a favorite puzzle type of many long-time readers), which yielded a riddle. The riddle I stole mercilessly from this site:

"Here on earth it is true, yesterday is always before today; but there is a place where yesterday always follows today. Where?

In a dictionary."

(I had the answer -- "in a dictionary" -- in mind when I went searching for the riddle. Interestingly, Googling for "riddle" and "in a dictionary" popped up valid possibilities almost immediately.)

The inimitable Nikki didn't have much experience with cryptograms, but she came through with flying colors on this one, and got the next clue right away.

Since she'd been working hard for the past couple of puzzles, I designed this step as a "gimmie"; I had a key marked:

RED
1 = A
2 = H
3 = U
4 = I
...
etc.

Nikki immediately recognized that she was to go *back* to the Sudoku puzzle she solved and use this new key on the old puzzle -- this time applying it to the red column.

This yielded the letter sequence "WITHMULAN," and soon she was popping open the *Mulan* DVD case.

Inside there was the (unbeknownst to her) final puzzle: a word search (one of her favorites) with the words needed to search taken from "trivia" questions about us she'd need to fill in ("The three states we took mini-honeymoons in were _____ (8), _____ (9), and _____ (13).") This 15×15 word search was generated using the free site online at http://puzzlemaker.school.discovery.com/WordSearchSetupForm.html.

The leftover letters spelled out a sentence that led her to a tin canister, a present from my parents which formerly held chocolate but had since succumbed to a mysterious balding looter, whom I am *very* close to positively identifying. And that canister contained . . . her present.

Really, it's a lot of work for her to get her nine-pack of Godzilla movies (the gift that keeps on giving fiery destruction). But she seemed happy with it; curiously, it took her about as long to solve it as it did for me to make it -- about two hours. And for a few of the puzzles I was able to be snuggled up with the Missus, watching her figure 'em out.

So, now that this narcissistic streak is almost over, what have I learned that I can steal and apply to the gaming world?

- If it's crucial for the PCs to pick up a clue for the adventure to continue, the clue needs to be *really* obvious.
- Although it's possible to reinvent the wheel, it's usually a lot easier to steal someone else's work (when it's for non-professional reasons, of course . . . otherwise that's not research; it's plagiarism).
- For that matter, shortcuts are fine in most cases. As a more extreme example, for some cryptograms I've simply typed the words as normal and then switched the font to something symbolic (such as one of the Wingdings fonts).
- One of the interesting aspects of puzzle-based scavenger hunts (especially the types you might see in an RPG) is that it's fun to watch the participant squirm and sort out the answers. It's useful, too, since you can see where the players are having the most fun.

Beyond that, scavenger hunts are an interesting type of game that can be a fun diversion, whether for the one you love, for friends, or for a gaming group. Create the dots, let the participants connect them, and everyone will hopefully have a good time.

--Steven Marsh

The Bridal Suite

by Elizabeth McCoy

This location could have been created by twisted magics, cunning robotics, or fiendish ultra-technology. It might be a common problem, or a one-of-a-kind annoyance -- or horror.

Appearance

The Bridal Suite, by default, is a small dwelling -- it could seem a mobile home, or a "hobbit hole" construction, set partly into a hillside. It has a bathroom and bedroom, and possibly a tiny kitchen; a larger one may have a pair of bedrooms. At first look, there is little to make it obviously expensive or a threat. (It would also be perfectly feasible to make an entire mansion, hidden asteroid base, or "bigger on the inside" dimension into a Bridal Suite.)

Construction

A Bridal Suite is not flimsy. That would defeat its purpose. Even the most mundane, robotic one has steel behind the cheap wallpaper. Setting them into rock, or placing them in hard-to-reach locations, is also quite in keeping with the theme.

Purpose

Bridal Suites are designed with roughly the same purpose in mind as megalomaniacs have when they lock attractive young princesses up in towers -- to coerce matrimony in fine passive-aggressive style. Once activated, they will not allow the prospective bride to leave, while the would-be groom (and any guests) are able to go freely.

(Magical and ultra-tech force fields can be selective. Teleporter pads by the door can redirect attempted escapes. More mundane technology may employ "airlock" techniques, so that certain doors only open when the captive is not in that room.)

While water and bathroom facilities are present, and the temperature is comfortable no matter how ragged clothing may be, food must be brought in from outside. (A more palace-like location may produce food via magic, invisible servants, or nanotech culinary replicators.)

Rescues . . . are also not permitted. Attacking an activated Suite is asking for trouble. Some are merely incredibly sturdy. Others may have point defense systems, offensive spells, or robotic minions who emerge from the walls.

Another thing a Suite is likely to guard against is anyone *else* tarnishing the "bride's" virtue. This is small consolation to whoever is locked up against her will.

Activation and Deactivation

A magical or ultra-tech Suite only needs its owner to state his intent or desire to wed someone who is also within the boundaries of the Suite. A mundane tech Suite may require a stint with a computer, designating the bride-to-be and activating the security and defense systems.

Deactivating the system happens when the would-be groom claims his bride -- this can be as metaphoric or literal as the GM desires. Magical Suites may impose magical compulsions to go through with even a "agreement" based on lies; magical ultra-tech may have similar mind-control abilities!

Naturally, there are other possible loopholes: the groom might be convinced to renounce his interest (or marry someone else by mistake), the Bridal Suite itself might be fooled into mistaking someone else for its owner, it could be tricked into expending its defenses until it no longer had the power to stop the captive from leaving, or some other expression of PC ingenuity.

Ownership

In general, a Bridal Suite is either made by or *for* someone, and that person is the owner. Upon the owner's demise, there is usually some way to shift its loyalties. It may depend on the bloodline, and only obey the wishes of someone of the appropriate genetic code. It could obey anyone who enters after it has lain empty and disused for a certain period of time. It might be particularly easy to fool, and function for anyone whose appearance is similar to the original owner. Other options include accessing the computer and changing the pass-codes, spilling blood in the mouth of a symbolically demonic statue, or other rote rituals.

Adventure Seeds

Robinson Ca-groom-so: An old Bridal Suite has fallen into the possession of, essentially, a hobo who found it and moved in. He is unaware of its power, and unfortunately is not a "drifter with a heart of gold," but is chauvinistic and selfish -- and likely to make a remark in jest which the Bridal Suite will take in all seriousness. Once a PC (or associated NPC) is imprisoned, however, he's happy to take that in stride and wait for her to recognize his natural superiority.

The Ancient Tradition: The PCs uncover the (large, palace version) Bridal Suite of a lost civilization -- which need not even be of the PCs' species -- with a ritual period of "captivity" as part of an honorable marriage ceremony. It even comes with instructions for its use! The question is, can the PCs keep it from falling into the hands of someone who would use it to keep a non-consenting harem?

The Odd Couple: *Bickering* PCs come across a Suite unawares. The enchantments (or programs) governing its behavior are not functioning as well as they could . . . to put it mildly. Anything which *might* be interpreted as a proposal will activate it, and it's not inclined to let the propos*er* escape, either!

A Modest Proposal: The PCs have been contacted by a desperate friend (or servant) of a captive. Time may be of the essence -- the would-be bridegroom is away on a trip (leaving the friend/servant to obtain food for the prisoner), but for how long?

Pyramid Review

The Secret of Zir'An RPG

Published by [Paragon Games](#) & [White Wolf, Inc.](#)

Written by Jason Armenta, Martin Caplan, Marcus Flores, Aram Gutowski, & Chris Hockabout

Illustrated, designed by Cory Allameier, David Ryan Paul, Steve Ellis, Jess Hickman, Chris Hockabout, Erwin Madrid, Chris Martinez, Dennis Nguyen, Joshua Gabriel, Timbrook, UDON with Greg Boychuk, Eric Kim, Jim Zubkavich, Michael Withem, Nick Wynlock, Dean Yuen, & Michelle Prahler

294-page b&w hardcover; $39.99

Zir'An is a ravaged land where Fate tries to maintain a balance of good and evil despite the effect on those caught in the middle. This may be why things go in cycles in *The Secret of Zir'An:* the world gets destroyed (or darn close) like clockwork every few millennia. This time, the Endwar leveled most everything worth living in, then consolidation efforts smacked the recovering peasants around, and most recently the evil Fane took over several locations. The savior Kah wandered the land like a nomadic John Connor, riling people up to take the fight to the Fane. Now the Treaty Nations hold back Fane incursions (the bad guys still hold bits of dirt and citizens hostage here and there), but theirs is an unstable peace. The seven gods mystically communicated to all races their departure from this world, and "the Hegemony," continues to pose a threat, though this group gets mentioned seldom and doesn't rate a listing in the index.

The core gamebook introduces the Finesse System. Each character has four primary stats rated one to 10: physique, mass (yes, mass), intelligence, and acuity. These define the persona's general mind and body, and are used to get derived stats like the damage they can do (and take), their speed, and their Shadow (a catchall representing your magical and spiritual attunements), among others. The three aptitudes -- knowledge, personal, and social -- are rated one through five. Once skills are added, points of Practice are associated with each (again, one to five). Finally, both skills and the difficulty of the task attempted are rated for the finesse level: basic, expert, advanced, and elite.

For the difficulty, this just tells the Hand of Fate (the GM) the matching target number: 15, 20, 25, or 30 respectively. To hit that number, roll a 10-sided die and add it to your stat, aptitude, and skill. For the character, finesse tells him what effects he may employ in combat depending on the chosen weapon type. For example, you may be able to ignore some armor, or even all of it if you "finesse" a called shot to the vitals. Beyond combat, the effects are a little less intimidating . . . you're allowed to narrate the extras you get from a superior success. If you were just trying to haggle for a heavy winter coat for your trip up the mountain, a good total might let you say, ". . . and I negotiate so warmly the merchant gives my traveling partner the same good deal on his outfit."

It's not a simple point-based creation system, though. You take an origin that offers you a base PC you like. This entitles you to skill packages, and where you came from, your age, and what your final numbers are come into focus. You also get Valdreyr, the book's fancy term meaning "those things that make you you." Colloquially, they're just pros and cons -- positive traits such as keen hearing and negative ones such as clumsy or allergies. This is all layered onto your chosen race, the races being . . . well, the names used in the book aren't important. They amount to human, dwarf,

elf . . .

There are the requisite chapters on equipment, combat, and magic. This last splits into two categories: rune and shadow magic. Runes greater and small are marked on the thing to be used. They can be sketched onto paper for quick effects, but the lasting items are those carved into rocks or etched onto the gear they'll affect. It's not a fast form of magic, but it sees a lot of use in towns for generating power or lighting the streets. Shadow mages are usually born and not made, and they've learned to use their own dark reflection to protect themselves, teleport, or assume new shapes. It's more cinematic, and while not all users are evil, neither are they the most popular dinner guests.

The illustrations fall mostly on the better end of the quality scale. Some of them are really well done, others are a bit sketchy (no pun intended), but none look to be completely devoid of talent. The creatures are well done insofar as you get the right creepy vibe looking at their portraits (even though calling the chapter "Adversaries" seems a bit potent since the things there are mostly critters).

This isn't your traditional fantasy land -- at least, it's not supposed to be -- as there are guns, airships, radios . . . essentially it's the kind of place where Indiana Jones, Frodo, and Sky Captain would all feel at home. The (comparatively) high-tech advancements mentioned earlier give way to mostly ordinary fantasy stuff by the book's end, so the consistency of vision suffers somewhat. It's as though the writers split the book in two and never spoke to each other. It's the sort of volume that has a new name for everything, and so you either learn all-new setting-specific terminology or get used to re-renaming everything back to something you can remember.

It's not a bad book, and the Finesse System is nice, but the setting doesn't seem to know what it wants to be. Plenty of background still doesn't really tell you who the best bad guys are. They may think the information has been imparted to the reader more fluently than it really has, because by the end, even if you've been paying close attention to all the interactions and political intrigues, the Hand of Fate still has to come up with his own adventures. It could be that they try to shove too much in one book because it has a not-quite-done feel that's probably going to take us into additional releases.

The editing isn't awful, just notably lacking. The writing is competent, and there are good ideas sprinkled through the early chapters -- would that these narrative bits were expanded to actual plot seeds. The cover makes a promise of adventure that the text just can't live up to. And *The Secret of Zir'An*? It pretty much stays secret.

--Andy Vetromile

Icosahedron Adventures

Refuge Part Two -- The Shield and the Canals
Organizations and Neighborhoods of a Steel Age Fantasy *d20 System* City

by Owen K.C. Stephens

This month we continue our look at sections of the city of Refuge with its richest and poorest boroughs, the Shield and the Canals.

The Shield

The Shield is the westernmost borough in Refuge, home to the Domant's palace, the River Wardens' boathouse, the nobles' Demesnes, and a very few businesses with noble patrons (the Silk House, Garden of Delights, Arcane Forge, and Gilded Forest). Though the Shield is one of the smaller boroughs, it holds more power than any other section of Refuge. It is home to the wealthiest, most influential, and most powerful citizens of the city.

The Shield is restricted in territory by strict terrain features. Its westernmost edge is a curved, elevated rock outcropping known as the Pauldron, which rests on solid bedrock. West of the Pauldron the land is soft and wet, good for growing some kinds of plants but poor for building heavy stone buildings or defensive walls. Its north and south borders are marked by the two rivers that flow into Refuge (and the ocean) from further inland. These rivers join just east of the Pauldron, creating a triangle-shaped slice of land that is elevated and protected on two sides by a natural moat of river water. This results in a roughly shield-shaped section of land.

These natural defenses made the Shield an obvious choice for an early fortification, and the first rulers of Refuge built their keep here. The keep evolved into the Domant's palace, and his court evolved into the nobility of Refuge. Because there is no good way to expand the space available in the Shield, and no one living there is willing to reduce the size of their own holdings, a home and grounds within its boundary is a status symbol among the movers and shakers of the city. A noble family that holds a Demesne within the shield is automatically a member of the high court, and wields political influence separate from whatever they can manage through diplomacy, bribery, patronage, and threats of force. Similarly, a noble family forced to move outside the Shield is limited in what official avenues of power they can explore (though many have found unofficial avenues just as effective).

The Shield is patrolled by the Domant's House Guard, though members of the City Militia and Refuge Guard are fairly common as well. The Domant takes a heavy hand in matters of the Shield, on the assumption that control of the Shield equals control of Refuge. As both the Red Hawks and River Marshals keep their headquarters here they are also common sights here, though neither has primary responsibility for keeping order (and the Marshals are well known for causing it, though less often in the Shield than outside of the city).

Red Hawks

The Red Hawks are the elite agents of the city, acting as a patrol in times of peace, long-range scouts and couriers in times of war, and investigators in times of mystery. They are chosen from applicants who may come from any social background but must pass extensive training and testing for ability, truthfulness, and loyalty to Refuge. This training and testing is undertaken by the Domant's house guard, members of the major religions sects, the City Militia, and arcane spellcasters working for the Guild League. All these groups must sign off an a trainee before he gains the badge of a Red Hawk.

The result of this rigorous system, with its built-in veto power held by four different groups (each with their own agendas and sub-groups), is twofold. First, anyone who successfully passes is sure to truly be a capable, trustworthy

agent with the best interests of Refuge at heart. Second, there are always many more applicants than accepted members, and the Red Hawks are always undermanned. In a city with an official census count of 100,000 souls (though no one truly knows how accurate that count was even when it was taken 15 years ago) there are generally no more than 50 Red Hawks at a time. Only when the city is facing a serious threat do the various factions that control the Red Hawks' recruitment put aside their differences and promote anyone who deserves the post, regardless of internal politics. Since such threats are often hard on Red Hawks, their numbers are depleted again shortly after the threat ends and politics cuts recruiting back down.

Once empowered with a writ from the Domant and given the traditional badge (a simple heraldic device with a red hawk on a field of black) a Red Hawk has considerable authority. A Hawk can arrest, question, and detain anyone not of noble blood, and can question even a noble or the Domant himself with 48 hours' warning. Red Hawks can commandeer Refuge Guard or City Militia, though they are loathe to do so. By law, Hawks also have the right to be heard in any trial (even those held in secret, though no law requires they be notified of such trials), and retain the old right of trial-by-combat. Red Hawks may go armed in the presence of any noble (or the Domant) and are immune to charges of theft, trespass, treason, and assault. Naturally this vast power causes jealousy among other guards, and has occasionally led to abuses. On the whole, however, the organization has proven its worth enough to be given the benefit of the doubt by most Refuge citizens.

Red Hawks can also be accused of a unique crime -- "actions not worthy of a Red Hawk." Anyone may level this accusation, but the Red Hawks themselves handle such cases. If at least 10% of the Hawks see merit in a charge, a trial is held by a group of 12 Hawks (4 chosen by the accused, 4 voted on by all Red Hawks except the accused and his 4 jurors, and 4 chosen by the Domant). If 5 or more Hawks vote guilty, the accused is banished or killed (depending on the offense). Such trials are rare, and often the crux of more complex political plots.

The Hawks are famous for taking anyone who can pass the entry exams, including women, nonhumans, wizards, and even ex-criminals. Such applicants are often weeded out by the prejudice of the groups that vet them, but existing red hawks discourage such prejudice whenever possible. A few make it through, resulting in a broader membership than any other military unit in the city.

River Wardens

The River Wardens are the closest thing to a navy Refuge has, and it's not that close. They are supposed to be guardians of the two rivers that lead into Refuge, clearing it of river pirates, brigands and natural threats to encourage traffic, and control the rivers' approaches to the city in time of war. Realistically, no serious threat to Refuge has come by river in more than two generations, and the River Wardens has become a place to put younger sons of major nobles, and older sons of rich merchants, to keep them out of the way of real business while allowing them to "honorably serve" Refuge.

The River Wardens have a dozen longship, essentially big canoes, they use to patrol the river. They also use them to compete in races, smuggle winter wine and illicit herbs, hold parties out of sight of the city's walls, and sleep off the effects o their revelries. The warden's boathouse is officially their territory, and within it the Wardens are immune to any other legal authority. Of course the Wardens have to come out regularly to gain supplies for their vices, so while a wrongdoing young noble may take haven within the boathouse, eventually he has to face proper authority unless the issue can be resolved.

The River Wardens are not entirely useless. They are trained to sail the river (though few would be able to handle a larger, seagoing vessel), use crossbows, short swords and spears, and tend to their own gear. Of the 120 or so River Wardens who tend to hold a badge at a time, as many as a dozen may actually be dedicated to their jobs and work to keep the city safe. The one thing that actually gets the River Wardens to act together is the death of one of their own, which drives them into a vengeful furor of activity. Most criminals and pirates know this, and thus flee the Wardens rather than fight them.

Garden of Delights

The Garden of Delights is a bordello enveloped in marble stone and gilded trim. This two-story building is only slightly ornamented on the exterior, but the inside is a marvel of gaslights, heavy blue satin, ornate plaster and woodwork and chandeliers of finely cut glass. The first impression of the Garden of Delights is that it's a private love nest, but that only remains if customers don't look behind curtains to find enforcers or speak to the staff to determine the price of a given activity. The entertainers here include pretty women, some half-elven, and a handsome young man or two. In the past it has offered less savory partners, but the current Domant has discouraged such options, and the Garden has complied by removing them from the establishment. Because of who runs the Garden, its staff is free of infection or disease.

Master Thurken is the proprietor of the Garden of Delights. He is an attractive older man who obviously understands the business of seduction. He is also a priest of a goddess of love and sex, though his choice of employment does not sit well with others in his church. He sees the Garden as a temple bringing pleasure to those who would otherwise be unable to glorify his deity, and uses his clerical powers to protect and augment his business. Most of the money he makes is either channeled back in to the Garden, or given to charity.

The Garden is seen as a seedy place to gather for secrecy of any kind by the powerful of the Shield, and is used for plotting as much as rutting. It's the ultimate unreachable destination for most common folk in Refuge, and many list it as the first place they's visit upon suddenly becoming wealthy. It's also the most prized post of every streetwalker and courtesan in town, and competition for one of its staff positions is fierce.

The Silk House

The Silk House is a large building near the center of the Shield. Once a noble family's demesne, it is now the headquarters of a merchant cartel that deals only in high-price items, including silks, spices, slaves (though these are never brought in to refuge itself, as they are illegal), and magic items. The proprietor, Euston Riversend, makes most deals with patrons personally, though he has a staff to ensure no one gets an appointment with him unless they have the coin to be worth his time. Riversend has managed to convince the Domant that magic items are too dangerous to allow "untrained" merchants to deal in them, and as a result it's illegal to buy or sell anything magic with a cost of greater than 1,000 gp anywhere but within the Shield. Since no other business within the Shield is interested, this gives Riversend a virtual monopoly. Only the fact that nobles themselves sometimes buy and sell such things, and that the Domant has friends among those who buy them from Riversend, prevents the Silk House from charging outrageously for anything magic. As it is, anything with a cost of less than 10,000 gp is likely to be special ordered as an afterthought, and may take weeks to arrive (payment is always in advance).

All business in the Silk House is done in a cool, large central chamber. Refreshments are served, and minstrels play in the background. Given the expenses Riversend deals with daily, such minor costs are considered trivial compared to the goodwill and aura of respect they generate. Riversend also often entertains friends, major nobles, and Refuge Guard captains to ensure Riversend is aware of any potential threat and his building is well-guarded. Riversend himself has numerous constructs he uses as guards.

The Canals

The Canals are found west of the Port Borough and south of the Shield. Officially the Canals are several separate districts (Tannery Row, Almoner's Quarter, Foreigner's Quarter, the Courtyards), but not even the residents of the borough care about such distinctions anymore. Only the poorest residents of Refuge live here, and even then some prefer homelessness. The Canals is the most run-down, smelly, damp, unpleasant section of the city, and represents the greatest failure of the rule of past Domants.

The Canals were built 30 years ago under the grandfather of the current Domant, and were supposed to bring great wealth and prosperity to Refuge. The idea was that since the city thrived on trade brought from both the twin rivers that flow into it and the ocean it sits on, a series of canals that increased the connections between these two waterways would bring new trade. An extensive system of canals were built to make a whole new "merchant's quarter," with white stone buildings, broad waterways to use as transport for goods, and streets big enough a cart drawn by eight

oxen could turn in them. The cost of expanding the city and its defenses by so much was great, but the Domant was convinced the return would be worth the expense.

The promised wave of prosperity never occurred. The problems that prevent the canals success were manyfold, and in retrospect should have been obvious. First, the cost of the project was massive, and as a result the Domant was advised to charge heavy taxes on anyone who bought and sold goods within the new merchant quarter. This discouraged anyone already doing business elsewhere in Refuge from moving their trade to the canals, which in turn prevented it from looking appealing to new customers, and thus making it a failure for those few merchants who did set up shop. The Domant revered the tax structure once this problem became evident, but by then the Canals had a reputation for bad business.

Second, no wealthy families wished to move in. The new tax structure made just living in the Canals expensive, and no one who could afford it was willing to leave their quarters in the Shield for a territory with unknown benefits. A few families that had moved out of the Shield in the past few generations due to economic hardship did see the canals as a second chance for influence, but soon found their reduced fortunes couldn't afford the pricey new borough. Once the Domant eliminated the high costs for living in the Canals, it was flooded by the poor and homeless, ensuring it would never be seen as an affluent section of the city.

Third, the canals themselves didn't perform as promised due to engineering efforts. While river water did flow through the stone waterways, the volume of space used by the canals compared to the entry and exit points of the system meant the water moved very slowly, and in some areas no current at all developed. Especially as the area become a slum for the destitute, the canals began to act (and smell) more like an open sewer than an attractive new way to move around. Since the Domant was already nearly broke from building the region, no money was available to re-engineer the canals, and the project was declared a failure. The Canals became a place for the poorest to live. A few businesses did move in -- including tanneries, dyers, and slaughterhouses -- since they found the cheap space and reduced complaints from neighbors worth the unpleasant working conditions. Because the winds off the sea blow past the canals last, this is a state of affairs that makes the rest of Refuge quite happy.

Channel of Lanterns

The northernmost of the canals is a long stretch of waterway lit at all times with a wide array of lanterns. This area is notorious for prostitution, gambling, robbery, and shady deals. It's only lightly patrolled by the city, and the assumption that such things are going to happen somewhere, and the canals is a better place than elsewhere in the city. People from all over Refuge come here for cheap thrills, though often they pay an unpleasant hidden cost in the form of disease, burglary, or blackmail.

This row is also home to the most powerful criminals in the Canals -- the Hundred Hands. This organized gang of thugs run most of the illicit and illegal activities of the Canals. They take a heavy percentage of everything, and arrange for robberies, smuggling, and extortion to fatten their coffers. They are intelligent enough not to bring down the attention of the Domant or the Red Hawks by killing people of important or allowing crime sprees to exceed what a community can afford, and leave healers and the sick alone. Within those restrictions, however, they squeeze the canals (and those who visit regularly) for every copper penny that can be pried lose.

Most of their money comes from semilegal loans, running illicit entertainments, robbery, and the synergies that come from combining these. Someone who comes to gamble regularly is given a chance to borrow money when he runs out, then escorted home when he exceeds his "credit." If he can't afford the weekly fee for the loan, he's forced to sell his goods or aid in future illegal activities. If he can afford the fees and pays off the loan, he's targeted for a burglary to lighten his excess funds. If any activity seems to be drawing undo attention from the authorities it is stopped (and if necessary, a scapegoat turns up dead with evidence to suggest he was guilt of said operation).

The Hundred Hands aren't rich, but they are secure and doing better than most residents of the Canals.

Healing Court

This area was originally designed to be a large open-air market, and sits in the center of the Canals. It is easily accessed by both street and canal. As the Canals sank into slum status, many homeless and poor began to build shelters here. A decade ago, the court was the center of a massive plague that threatened to spread out of the canals and into the city. The current Domant ordered the cleric of every temple in town to go stop the plague, and rather than face his wrath they obeyed. The outbreak was prevented, but cases of the disease kept popping up in the canals (though in low numbers). The healers cleared out the population of the court, and set up tents for their own use and to treat patients. Over the course of years they could never say the plague was "over," and thus the Domant insisted they stay. Soon, anyone with an injury or disease knew to come to the healer's court for treatment.

Although there are many healers here, their talents (and spells) are taxed near the limit just keeping the dirty, underfed, hard-living population of the canals healthy. The Domant still requires every temple in the city to provide a number of healers for the court (based on the temple's size), as a precaution against further plague. As a result the temples have few healers beyond those they send to work (and often live) in the healer's court. The powerful nobles of the Shield can afford their own private clerics for their health needs, and the most devout within each temple receive care if sick, but anyone wishing to buy curatives with a donation must travel to the healer's court and find a cleric with time and magic to spare (which may take a day or three).

Because the priests and trained healers of many different temples work together in the court, it has also become a place of learning. Herbalists, bards, priests, and churgeons from a dozen different religions and traditions have worked together in the court for a decade now, trading lore and experimenting on the poor to see what works best. Recently word of the new healing techniques and magics being developed in the court has drawn apprentice healers from far away here, to observe and learn. The Domant sees this as a good thing, and encourages it with deliveries of bread and tents to new healers joining the court (a cheap price for more healing in the city).

Gueter Hauk

Gueter Hauk is both a persona and an institution on the canals. He's a freelance poleman, pushing a small skiff through the canals, taking passengers and cargo where he's paid to, as long as both destinations are within the canals. He sleeps and lives on his skiff, and makes regular runs to and from the healer's court. He's the only poleman who regularly operates in the canals, and has a keen awareness of what parts of the borough are safe, both in terms of clogged canals and crumbling buildings and where thieves or spies might be found. He keeps much of this information to himself, but can be drawn out to give hints and clues. Anyone making a Gather Information check about something happening in the Canals gains a +2 bonus if they pay Hauk a cp, and a +4 if they give him a sp (no bonus is granted for giving out more money, it makes Hauk suspicious).

Brainhouse

The Brainhouse is the largest slaughterhouse in Refuge, found on the far west of the Canals where cattle are often brought in large herds. The cattle are brought live, kept in pens near the Brainhouse until sold, then often slaughtered and salted for transport overseas. The name of the place comes from the large, blood-splattered men who are paid to hit each animal in the head with a maul when it's brought in, killing it in one blow by spraying its brains across the floor. These men are called "brainers," though they are often dull-witted at best, and also serve as the Brainhouse's security.

The Brainhouse is the cheapest slaughterhouse, and thus the most used, but it has an unsavory reputation. It refuses to prepare meat in any special way, making it unpopular with religions with dietary requirements. It's also a common source for material components for wizards in refuge, selling bone chips, blood, and similar items. If a worker is injured on the job, any body part he loses is claimed by the owner and sold as material components as well.

Additionally, people claim bodies are often hidden here by the Hundred Hands, perhaps mixed in with other meats, and some whisper it's secretly a temple to dark gods of death. In fact, both rumors are true, and only the fact the Brainhouse is owned by a powerful wizard able to block most divinations has kept the place from being raided by the Red Hawks or decried by respectable temples. The wizard, Amond Shea, was also responsible for the plague that broke out a decade ago (see the Healer's Court), and is slowly building a cult of the poor and oppressed to eventually

overthrow Refuge. For now, he's building strength and keeping quiet, though he does gather the faithful once a month for a human sacrifice.

* * *

Next Month: We look at the last two boroughs, and present the Refuge Map.

Kings in Darkness

by Bevan Thomas

"As flies to wanton boys, are we to th' gods, they kill us for their sport."
--William Shakespeare, *King Lear*

The black magician, the diabolist, the necromancer, the sorcerer. Whatever you choose to call him, he is one who has bargained with dark forces for his power, and he is one who is found in many stories and many roleplaying games. Though some such sorcerers walk alone, denying the existence of any power greater than themselves, many choose to bargain with outside forces, from dark deities to lesser malignant spirits (known as demons). Through the gifts and teachings of these creatures, the black magicians receive great power and knowledge. However, they also lose much of their coveted freedom, and they frequently even lose their souls.

This article looks at the different relationships and bargains that a sorcerer may strike with dark gods and demons. It includes no rules, only advice and ideas, and thus is appropriate for any roleplaying game that includes such malignant forces, including ***Call of Cthulhu, In Nomine, Dungeons & Dragons,*** and various ***GURPS*** settings.

"The Patrons"

There are many reasons to serve a dark patron. In some campaign settings, it is the only path to supernatural power. In such situations, people are required to give service to malignant forces in order to gain the magic that would grant them dominance, frequently sacrificing their souls in the process. In other settings, service to evil forces is not the only way to gain supernatural power, but it is still one of the easiest. The acquisition of arcane knowledge is a long and difficult path, and bargaining with demons and their ilk offers an effective short cut. Though their masters may require them to do a variety of blasphemous and repugnant things, most black magicians consider themselves above mundane ethical considerations anyway. And though it is said of sorcerers that they have handed their souls over to dark forces, sorcerers are nothing if not egotistical, and most believe that they will find a way to slip that particular noose.

Sorcerous patrons fall into two main categories: dark gods and demon. Dark gods are or were part of the pantheon of deities that helps to create and define the universe, and are therefore very powerful and inhuman. Though not necessarily evil, dark gods are at least amoral and usually associated with the more malevolent elements of creation. Demons are lesser malignant spirits; in some cultures they are servants to dark gods, though in others they are answerable only to themselves. Demons are more approachable and more easily bargained with than gods. However, they lack a deity's power and are frequently more treacherous.

Dark Gods

For the purpose of this article, the term "dark god" is applied to a deity that, though not necessarily malignant, is very dangerous, and has a system of values quite different from conventional morality.

There are four kinds of dark gods:

1. **The Enemy:** In some religions, dark gods are enemies of the principle pantheon of gods (sometimes referred as the "gods of light"). An example of this is in Zoroastrianism, where the dark god Angra Mainyu strives to overthrow the benevolent Ahura Mazda. This is the simplest kind of dark god, as it creates a visible boundary, clearly defining what is good and evil. A sorcerer who bows down to an Enemy is placing himself in opposition to the sacred order of things. The Enemy is also the most common kind of dark god in roleplaying games and fantasy novels.
2. **The Necessary Evil:** Though the Enemy is very prevalent in fantasy fiction, the Necessary Evil is much more common in mythology. This kind of dark god is tolerated by the rest of the pantheon; for whatever reason, he is

needed for the universe to properly function. One of the best examples of a Necessary Evil is the Egyptian god Set, who is tolerated by the other gods despite his traitorous and violent nature since they need him to drive back Apep, the serpent who attempts to devour the sun. Another example is Hecate of Greco-Roman mythology, who has an important function as goddess of the moon and prophesy, though she is also the patroness of witchcraft and murder. This kind of dark god has a more intricate role in the religion than the Enemy does. Because the god is a necessary part of the pantheon, worshipping him does not automatically make the sorcerer an enemy of society, but still sets him apart from it.

3. **The Twisted Pantheon:** In some worlds, the entire pantheon of gods is malignant. Arguably, the Aztec Pantheon is an example of this, with a variety of alien gods that must be fed with numerous bloody sacrifices. It is also prevalent in horror fiction, such as H. P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos (which features such deities as Azathoth, the Blind Sultan of Chaos; and Shub-Niggurath, the Black Goat of the Woods with a Thousand Young). The Twisted Pantheon is usually only appropriate for a horror campaign. In such a setting, worshipers of the dark gods are not enemies of the universe, since it is the dark gods that embody the universe.

4. **The Shadowed Side:** In many religions, gods have various aspects, some benevolent and some less so. For example, Odin, the king of the Norse pantheon, is both the god of rulership and poetry and of sorcery and madness. As a divine being, Odin transcends mortal ethical considerations and encompasses both sides of human nature: the good and the bad. Another example is the Baron Samedi from Voudoun folklore. He is the patron of the dead, and is both a benevolent entity who guides souls into the afterlife and the spirit that sorcerers invoke to bring death to their enemies. The Baron represents both sides of death: everlasting peace and final destruction. The Shadowed Side is the most complex kind of dark god. It makes the gods more difficult to classify and means that they do not easily fall into camps of good or evil. It also places the sorcerer in an interesting position, he pays homage to a "god of light," but in a darker manner. Either this form of worship is accepted the orthodoxy, an acknowledgment of the dual nature of the deity, or it is branded a heresy, at best coldly tolerated, and most likely viciously persecuted.

The appropriate kind of dark god for a world depends greatly on the campaign that the Game Master wishes to create.

For example, having the Twisted Pantheon would create a very dark and perhaps even nihilistic campaign, where spirituality and faith ultimately derive from a monstrous source there would be very little hope in such a world. In a campaign with a Twisted Pantheon, people might take up sorcery in desperate self-preservation or for the greater good. After all, if they ally themselves with the dark forces of creation, those forces might deign to spare them and those they hold dear. One of the reasons that the Aztecs sacrificed so many people was because they believed that the Sun would die unless fed on human hearts. These sorts of cosmological truths might trap otherwise good people in evil situations, forcing them to commit acts of murder and torture in order to help the greater good. Perhaps the fields need to be watered yearly with the blood of a young virgin to feed Bechorath, goddess of fertility, in order for the villagers to grow their crops. If there are no crops, the village starves, and therefore appeasing the goddess is necessary: the ends justify the means.

Furthermore, in a Twisted Pantheon campaign, sorcery is frequently the only way to gain real power. Technology can only do so much, and it is often regulated by the gods. If a person does not pay homage to the dark gods and accept their gifts, he will be in no position to do anything, for good or evil. In order to make a positive change, that person needs to worship the Twisted Pantheon.

Though the Twisted Pantheon could be a very interesting and challenging type of campaign, it is not for all people. Many players would find it gloomy and depressing after a while, and a lot of players like the idea that they are changing the shape of the campaign world, frequently for the better. In such a campaign as this one, such changes would be almost impossible.

Therefore, most campaigns would employ one of the other options for dark gods. "The Enemy" is the most common choice, with one or many evil gods causing mischief and mayhem in opposition to the more prevalent good pantheon. As mentioned previously, this creates a clear good-and-evil dichotomy, allowing the player characters to easily tell who their friends and foes are, and leading easily to high adventures of the epic quests and monster-slaying variety. However, "The Necessary Evil" or "The Shadowed Side" could make a fascinating alternative.

The kind of dark god chosen helps to define the role sorcerers take in the campaign setting. If worshipping an Enemy, sorcerers are clearly in the adversarial position. They serve are deity who is anathema to the benevolent status quo, and therefore set themselves apart from society and common decency. With a Twisted Pantheon, sorcerers are still generally malevolent, but they are the status quo, and it is the benevolent forces, if they exist at all, who are ideological outlaws. However, since the dark gods are the source of most, if not all, power, it means that good people might need to practice black magic, and are therefore less likely to be purely evil. In "The Necessary Evil" and "The Shadowed Side," the dark gods are an accepted part of society, or at least versions of accepted deities. They have a certain place in the status quo, and their sorcerous servants may be tolerated, if not necessarily liked. Because of this, the sorcerers do not need to be evil, and in fact could be fulfilling a pivotal aspect of the culture or cosmology. This makes religious interaction more complex and morally ambiguous, leading to a radically different sorcery-based campaign.

It is, of course, possible to have a campaign that combines the different kinds of dark gods. Perhaps in their war against Naharai, god of evil (an Enemy), the gods of light have grudgingly accepted Sargon, patron of assassins and spies (a Necessary Evil), and Iri, goddess of the sun, is both a healer and destroyer (a Shadowed Side). In this campaign, sorcerers would probably face less censure invoking Sargon or the dark side of Iri as opposed to invoking Naharai, and in fact might be sanctioned by society as long as they are not too excessive.

Demons

For the purpose of this article, demons are considered to be malignant spirits who lack the vast power and elemental nature of gods. Whereas gods are pivotal aspects of creation, and in fact may be the instigators of the universe, demons are much less important beings. They also tend to have more comprehensible powers and goals. While a sorcerer can treat many demons as equals or even inferiors, there exist creatures that, while not on the same level as the gods, will be far more powerful than most sorcerers can ever hope to be. These beings are referred to herein as demon lords.

In certain campaigns, such as those based on Christian folklore, demons are the only entities that can grant sorcerous power. In others, they are merely an alternative force to bargain with for black magic. Perhaps the demons are servants of the dark gods, or perhaps they operate under their own hierarchy. Either way, demons have their own goals and desires, which the sorcerer can use to his advantage.

A benefit of demons is that they can be bargained with on more equal grounds than gods. Though the more powerful demons are much more powerful than a mortal sorcerer, even they are more approachable than a deity. A demon's demands are usually more specific and easier, such as "feed me the hearts of 20 innocent men" or "recover the Staff of Lost Souls" as opposed to a vague and lengthy list of rites and sacrifices that would be expected of a god's disciple.

However, demons are frequently more treacherous than gods. Even the basest dark god usually has loftier goals than a demon, and generally treats his worshippers more fairly. Demons, on the other hand, tend to lie and cheat anytime they think that this would give them an upper hand. Which makes dealings with demons chancy at best.

The Infernal Pact

The relationships between sorcerers and dark gods tend to be reasonably open-ended. The sorcerer sacrifices to his deities and preaches their gospels, and they sometimes deign to grant him power. In most cases, the gods are too powerful for the sorcerer to bargain with them on anything close to an equal level, and so the most he can do is serve them to the best of his ability and hope to eventually gain their favor.

The sorcerer's relationship with demons is somewhat different. A sorcerer generally binds lesser demons to his will, or at worst, pays for their services with fairly minor favors (for example, keeping his imp familiar fed on sheep eyes). Even in the case of more powerful demons, sorcerers will usually only do the demon's bidding in return for immediate benefits. Therefore, the demon and the sorcerer draw up an agreement: an infernal pact.

In many campaigns, the demon is forced by his very nature to abide by the pact, and is physically unable to break it. In

others, he can break it if he chooses, but usually finds it in his best interests to honor it. After all, if word got around that demons broke their side of the bargain, no more mortals would deal with them (and so the demon lords would probably punish any demonic violators very harshly). In most settings, the demon is only forced to hold to the letter of a pact, leaving him free to ignore the spirit (forcing sorcerers to phrase pacts in the most exact manner possible, so that the demon has no room for interpretation).

The pact itself may take a variety of forms. In some campaigns, it only needs to be a spoken agreement, perhaps sealed by a handshake, a mingling of blood, or something similar. In others, a physical contract is required, possibly made of ghoulish components such as the blood of a hanged murderer written on parchment made of human flesh, and signed with the blood of the participating sorcerer. The second kind would place those who cannot read at a disadvantage, but in most cases, demons are required to truthfully read out the words of the contract.

Depending upon the campaign, the pact may not necessarily require the mortal's soul. But that is still the most common price, and so this article will discuss it first.

Selling Your Soul

In many campaigns, especially ones based on Christian belief, all deals with demons damn a person's soul. It shows the ultimate foolishness and shortsightedness of the sorcerer that he trades a few years of great power for an eternity of torment. In these campaigns, the loss of the soul is frequently not so much a part of the agreement between devil and mortal, but is instead a by-product due to the pact being a sin. The learning and practice of black magic is an attempt to defy God's will and consort with His enemies, and therefore is just as damnable an act as murder or treachery.

Why would someone willingly sell his soul? Surely being able to control minds and ravage bodies for a few short years is poor compensation for an endless existence of misery and pain? In some cases, such as when the loss of the soul is simply a by-product of the pact, it does not need to be mentioned in the contract. The demon is simply doing the sorcerer a favor or two, never telling him the consequences of these "favors." Of course, priests and preachers claim that dealing with these powers causes damnation, but the average sorcerer pays little attention to such sources.

Even if the sorcerer knows he is selling his soul, there are many reasons for the sorcerer to accept. Dark magicians are nothing if not egotistical, and frequently believe that they will be able to outsmart the forces of Hell and cheat their doom. Furthermore, their demon patrons usually behave as the epitome of selfless friendliness and warmth when speaking to the black magician, and many sorcerers come to believe that their associates do not really mean what they say about "damnation" and if worse comes to worse, in Hell they will be still be good friends. Also, some will sacrifice everything for a particular goal. A person might be willing to face damnation as long as they are able to avenge themselves on the person who ruined their lives, gain the love of an individual, or feed their starving family. Most demons are masters at capitalizing on the weaknesses of others.

Other Pacts

In some campaigns, the practice of black magic merely angles the soul toward Hell, and does not cause instant damnation. In others, the damning of the soul does not benefit the demon in question. After all, it's all very well if the learning of black magic will cause the soul of Sir Edmund Bartleby to fall into the clutches of the Prince of Darkness upon his death, but it does not benefit the demon Aeyoet, who would want something else from the deal. In both these cases, the demon will demand something for himself as one of the conditions for the infernal pact.

The demonic requests depend upon how powerful the demon is, what the mortal wishes out of the deal, and how much the demon thinks he can get away with asking for. An imp might be satisfied with a few pints of the sorcerer's blood a month, but a duke of Hell would require a little more.

Some demons wish to be worshipped as gods, with sacrifices made to them. Others require food: these can range from rich cakes to precious pearls to human flesh. A demon might request a specific task, such as assassinating a particular person, starting a cult, or recovering an artifact. Some demons wish for the sorcerer to sin, further binding him to them and their masters. In certain campaigns, demons have province over particular sins, and want to expand them, thus a

demon of lust might convince a sorcerer to seduce a married woman, whereas a demon of wrath would prefer the sorcerer to provoke a feud. A particularly horrific form of payment is to bear a demon child (either by copulating with a demon or by being artificially inseminated with demonic energy). Though more common with female sorcerers, male ones occasionally undergo this unnatural labor as well.

Malefic Rituals

Many dark gods and demons crave sacrifice and worship. These rituals can serve a variety of purposes, such as supplying energy to the spirits through the act of devotion, feeding them on the sacrifices made, supplying moments of entertainment, and giving a chance for their servants to wallow in sin, turning them away from the path of righteousness.

Dark gods generally prefer complex rituals of worship, whereas demons -- often being of a more pragmatic mind -- concentrate on the sacrifice. A ceremony for a dark god will usually be very long and drawn out, similar to an act of worship in a more "wholesome" faith. It might contain long sermons about the power and majesty of the god, readings from his "holy" texts, and hymns sung by his worshippers. The sacrifice is usually very reverent, and highly stylized in its presentation. Conversely, a sacrifice to a demon is often much simpler, almost like a business arrangement, with the sorcerer simply announcing something along the lines of "Rakkath, prince of the Abyss, I offer to you the hearts of three white lambs and of the shepherds that guarded them. In return give to me the secrets of the three Black Grimoires of Dibon." However, some demons prefer to be worshipped and some gods prefer the quick fix of burnt offerings without all the empty benedictions.

Sacrifices, Body and Blood

A common sacrifice in medieval lore was a baby goat, frequently one with black fur. This derives from the association of Satan with goats. Another favorite was a white lamb, which is identified with purity, humanity, and Christ, and thus the destruction of the creature in a demonic ritual is a perversion of purity. Other animal sacrifices that might be of interest to demons are doves (symbols of purity and peace), dogs (the guardians of humanity), and cows (the givers of food and drink).

Human sacrifice is another favored choice. It is more difficult, however, as humans are harder to acquire than animals, and their loss is more easily noticed and likely to cause a commotion. In some campaigns, properly sacrificing a person automatically places the victim in the power of whatever dark entity the sacrifice was dedicated to, instantly damning the poor soul. However, in other campaigns, the spirit still goes to its just reward, and therefore only those people which the dark god or demon lord feels that they would have no chance of corrupting (or are considered too unimportant to bother corrupting) would be sacrificed.

Another example of sacrifice is the giving up of the sorcerer's own body parts or life essence. For instance, a sorcerer might sacrifice an eye, some of his fingers, or even an entire limb to his patron, giving up physical wholeness in return for power. Alternately, the demon might take a few years of his life, his health, or even an emotion or memory.

The most prevalent form of personal sacrifice is through demonic familiars. Some sorcerers are served by familiar spirits who act as mediators between them and the Spirit Realm. In order to feed these familiars, sorcerers must feed them some of their own blood. This is usually taken from a cut in the palm of the hand or suckled from a nipple like mother's milk. The familiar may suckle from a normal nipple, or a special one that was created through sorcerer's initiation ritual. In the Middle Ages, this extra nipple was called "the Witch's Tit" and was considered one of the surest proofs of black magic.

Other possible sacrifices include destroying objects (such as treasured heirlooms, magical items, or relics of opposing faiths), giving up semen, spit, or other fluids, or offering up food.

The merits of a sacrifice frequently depend upon the nature and tastes of the sorcerer and patron involved. For instance, a demon might prefer lambs' eyes to cow kidneys, or a human sacrifice might be welcomer if it is of the

sorcerer's closest friend or a family member. The heart is a favored body part to sacrifice, since many cultures consider it the seat of consciousness, and thus the container of the soul. Other popular offerings include eyes (windows into the soul), brains (the mind), and tongues (due to the great importance of speech in interacting with the world).

Sometimes particular sacrifices and rituals must be done at particular places (such as crossroads, graveyards, or dark forests), times (some people call midnight "the Witching Hour"), or days (such as the nights of the full moon or Halloween). These might depend upon the patron in question or apply to all dark spirits. Furthermore, the treatment of sacrifices usually varies from patron to patron (a god of the sea might wish all sacrifices to be tossed into the water at high tide, whereas a demon of travel might prefer his victims to be hung at the crossroads).

Acts of Worship

Acts of worship take many forms, depending upon the patron in question. Among the more morally acceptable dark gods, they are frequently relatively normal religious services, with a preacher leading prayers to his god, granting benedictions, and singing hymns. The service might cumulate in a blood sacrifice, but it will still be in a strict and civilized manner.

Other gods and demons prefer more colorful displays. Some services may be nothing more than orgies, with their practitioners showing their superiority to the "common herd" by indulging their every whim and experiencing every perversion. Ironically, the attempts of many sorcerers to cast off the shackles of society end up making them slaves to their baser desires. Their dark lords usually prefer it this way, as the sorcerers become more and more dependent on them to feed their blasphemous needs.

There is a Christian belief that the Devil cannot create, only pervert (as true creation is the sole province of God). Therefore, the rituals that Satan grants his worshippers are distortions of Church rites. The most well known of these is the Black Mass. It is supposedly performed on Friday night, and includes such activities as reading the Bible backwards, stamping on the cross, and cursing God's name. Through the Black Mass, sorcerers show their loyalty to Satan, and further alienate themselves from God and the community by desecrating the holy sacraments. Obviously, ceremonies such as the Black Mass would only exist in a world where the dark gods and demons are in opposition to deities of light, since otherwise there would be no sacred rituals to pervert.

The Final Word

The role that the forces of darkness play within a world can serve as the backdrop for exciting adventures or even entire sagas, providing adversaries, temptations, and treachery. But before a campaign's protagonists can fight against the darkness (or be seduced by it), the GM needs to know what the darkness demands, and what it offers in return.

Pyramid Review

Truth & Justice RPG

Published by [Atomic Sock Monkey](#)

Written by Chad Underkoffler

Cover by Greg Holkan

Illustrated by Greg Holkan, Scott Kane, & Randy Milholland

133-page PDF document, $13
133-page b&w softcover; $25

One of the most interesting roleplaying games of 2004 was Chad Underkoffler's ***[Dead Inside: The Roleplaying Game of Loss & Redemption,](#)*** detailing as it did the loss and eventual regaining of its protagonists' souls in the dream-like Spirit World. He has since followed it up with the surprisingly deep but nevertheless zany and knockabout ***Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot RPG,*** based on the Origins-Award-nominated board game of the same name. The third of his titles tackles an altogether more traditional genre, that of the superhero comic book.

Commercially this is already a crowded market, but unfazed by such pressures ***Truth & Justice*** is not just a complete roleplaying game but also a platform from which Chad can cast his eye over the genre. This is evidenced in the opening chapter, which describes and analyses each of the genre's elements, forms, and eras. Both an interesting read and an excellent good introduction to the genre, this is intelligent and informative and about as dry as you would want without being scholarly. Pleasingly, this explanation comes right up to date in including the animated version of the genre, best typified by *Batman: The Animated Series.*

But before all this analysis, the author explains what ***Truth & Justice*** is all about: the struggle to uphold the two elements of the game's title against lies and injustice, and their unfair and corrosive influence, plus the heroic ideals necessary for truth and justice to prevail. This is a world of "mad beautiful ideas" too numerous to mention set on a stage upon which the protagonists perform much more than is normal. Such protagonists (or player characters) are indeed super, able to command great forces, tap into ancient sorceries, comprehend science beyond our ken, build amazing gadgets, and have trained themselves in skills and knowledges without peer. Whatever the style of world set by the GM -- Four Color, Grim 'n' Gritty, Cinematic, or Animated, the heroes should stand for what is right and upstanding . . . in other words, ***Truth & Justice.***

As with the other two games, ***Truth & Justice*** employs Atomic Sock Monkey's PDQ -- or Prose Descriptive Qualities -- System, the ***Fudge***-like system that encourages the players to define their characters and abilities. These can represent a character's personality; physical, mental, or social skills; relationships; professional abilities; resources; and flaws. Each quality is assigned a rank: Poor, Average, Good, Expert, or Master. Each rank is assigned a value ranging from -2 to +6 applied to a 2d6 roll when handling any conflict situation under the PDQ System. Whether involving physical, mental, or social conflict, all are handled neatly on the same scale, with damage levied directly from a character's qualities, rank by rank. Superpowers are handled on a higher scale, but still in a similar fashion. This means that all can be equally effective; for example, a blast of fire might take down one villain, but not (say) an invulnerable Brick more susceptible to some witty repartee.

A character's superpowers, origin, and motivation for using his abilities are added on top of the ordinary character, with the superpowers needing to be defined and agreed upon by both GM and player. This places a greater demand

upon the player and his imagination, because the powers as described are suggestions on how they *might* work, not how they *do* work. What might be termed the problem powers -- intangibility or phasing, super speed, sorcery, teleportation, and time control -- are all handled well. Likewise, so are powers that let you do lots of things, such as weather control. Ultimately though, the GM has to set the limitations on how each works. Highly skilled individuals are also allowed for, with the Intense Training quality enabling the creation of characters similar to Batman or The Punisher. The aim here is encompass any hero type, and by place them on the same scale allow them to operate side-by-side.

Where powers and qualities are broad in scope, a hero can narrow and refine them through stunts, tricks, new applications, and the like. Thus a hero with weather control powers can use them to temporarily fly, or a hero with super speed could run up walls or across open water. Stunts require the expenditure of Hero Points to activate, but can be turned into signature stunts and become a permanent part of a hero's repertoire.

Where *Truth & Justice* becomes more interesting is in its encouragement of each player to undertake the hero's role through the use of Hero Points. They are expended to bring new facts to light about a situation, resist a character's motivation, to create a contact, or temporarily improve a quality or power, amongst others. They are awarded for a character following his motivation, being heroic, accepting Revolting Developments (adverse plots or story lines inflicted on the character by the GM), being affected by a power's limitation or character's vulnerability, and for playing to the game's genre. In addition to backgrounds, origins, motivations, vulnerabilities, and limitations sparking story hooks, so does the first damage suffered in conflict, this being related to the reduced quality. Again like *Dead Inside,* the game's rules and mechanics are geared towards a certain type of play.

A character's Hero Point pool is known as the MAX, which can be increased. Accrued at either a slow or quick rate, the GM adds a tick against the character's MAX whenever he is awarded Hero Points. Once the number of ticks exceeds MAX, it is increased by one and the tick tally resets. MAX is also used to pay for new or increased power and quality ranks, as well as signature stunts.

Mechanically, *Truth & Justice* possesses two potential drawbacks resulting from the PDQ System's adaptation to the genre. One is the time necessary to develop stunts mid-game, and the other is the increased complexity of PDQ conflict resolution in *Truth & Justice.* It has more to keep track of than in *Dead Inside,* but a fully worked and explained conflict example helps to offset both of these problems. So does the GM's advice, which does not start with the basics like other PDQ titles, but is nevertheless both appropriate and useful. It includes an array of heroes and villains, some of whom appear in the three settings, plus a selection of gadgets, trophies, MacGuffins, and plot hooks.

The game comes with not one official *Truth & Justice* Universe, but three very different settings. All are well explained, come with a host of NPCs, campaign suggestions, and model sub-genres particular to the superhero genre. The first is "Second String Supers," an animated style campaign that is the most traditional of the three and reminiscent of *Batman, The Animated Series.* Here the characters help the leading hero of Drakesville, Dragon Knight, while he is busy with the Justice Alliance. "SuperCorps" is a cinematic setting, some 20 minutes into the future, where the multinational corporations or multi-corps possess more influence than they do today. Heroes join or form super-consultancies, agencies that hire out individuals to undertake the type of tasks that only superheroes can accomplish, torn between greed or heroic altruism. The third setting is also the most interesting. In "Fanfare For The Amplified Man," the player characters are ordinary men and women who have in their own smaller way acted heroically. In a dream they are gifted with powers, which they are expected to put to positive use. Set in the here and now, this setting also has the most constraints upon choice of powers for the characters, and, being very player driven, it asks each to wonder what they would do with great power and great responsibility.

Finally, *Truth & Justice's* excellent bibliography not only showcases the author's tastes, it is also full of good reading, playing, and viewing suggestions. If the majority of the artwork leaves much to be desired, *Truth & Justice's* writing is never less than assured and always on target. In bringing his sensibility to the genre, the author makes *Truth & Justice* more narrative or story driven than most superhero games, particularly with the conflict rules that activate story hooks and reward Hero Points for suffering Revolting Developments, and for in-character and in-genre play. *Truth & Justice* has the feel of old-school supers RPGs, say, *Marvel Superheroes* from TSR and Games Workshop's *Golden Heroes* (especially the latter's campaign focus), but its mechanics reflect a more modern and flexible approach,

offering choice in character creation without the resort to points and bean counting.

With rules that successfully enforce the genre and reward good play (probably a bonus to anyone wanting to play a supers RPG), three fine settings, and a first-rate bibliography, *Truth & Justice* is everything we have come to expect from this author. As one man's take on the superhero genre, *Truth & Justice* is superbly realized and successfully showcases how the light and easy PDQ System handles an often-difficult genre.

--Matthew Pook

Scenes and Sensibility

As foretold in our last installment, this past week was spent visiting my parents. Among other fun activities (including attending a Ren Faire in my wedding outfit and sitting through a time-share sales pitch for a $118 gift card) I actually got to watch a couple of movies on my parents' Luxembourg-sized big-screen TV. The second movie was *Steven Spielberg's Tom Cruise's H.G. Wells' War of the Worlds,* a movie that I was so thoroughly disgusted with that I hated practically every character in the movie and found myself heartily rooting for the aliens, going so far as offering to ship our would-be invaders the latest in anti-viral medication if it would just shut up the nonstop barrage of characters who alternate between screaming everything five times each without saying anything pertinent, and screaming incoherently without bothering to listen.

Typical dialog:

Dad: Get in the car.
Son: What's going on?
Dad: Get in the car. Get some food and get in the car.
Son: Won't you tell me what's going on?
Dad: DON'T ARGUE WITH ME! GET ALL THE FOOD YOU CAN CARRY AND GET IN THE CAR!
Son: No! I'm not going anywhere! You're not my primary caregiver and I love mom more!

Suggested revision:

Dad: Get in the car.
Son: What's going on?
Dad: I just witnessed several hundred people get vaporized. Their ashes are what I'm shaking off onto the kitchen floor. Your choices are 1) get all the food in the house and get in the car, or 2) stay here and free me up to have a new first child. You have three seconds.
Son: ... Well, I get to pick the radio station.
Dad: Fine.
Son: I'll be playing nothing but John Williams.
Dad: Stay here and die.

Anyway, *War of the Worlds* has the privilege of being the only movie I can think of where I actually had to leave the room for 20 minutes or so during the movie to detox, closing the door lest I be exposed to its damaging radiation. By the time I returned, the movie had advanced to a state where aliens were going door to door in the 100,000,000 basements in the country (and, presumably, around the rest of the world), meaning that things had gotten *much* more logical in my absence.

The second movie I had the chance to witness was *Flightplan,* a deceptively titled movie in that, as best I can tell, no flight plan was actually involved anywhere significantly involved with the plot. Really, *Ticket Stub* would have provided a more accurate snapshot into the action.

Oh, I feel this is the point I should include the standard disclaimer that I will do my darndest to tie this into gaming Real Soon Now.

Anyway, *Flightplan* was an enjoyable enough movie; Jodie Foster is always a joy to watch, the direction was neat, and the story was diverting enough. Really, there were only two crimes the movie committed. Its second-biggest crime wasn't its fault at all; the DVD we were watching was the full-screen version, since my mom chooses that edition so she can watch the bigger picture without glasses. Unfortunately, on the widescreen television this gave Jodie Foster's normally cute face the appearance of a cross between an Alien Grey and Miss Piggy.

The second crime, however, is the fact that the plot -- while eminently enjoyable to watch -- had the resilience of a soaking wet piñata, as if any hole poked in the film would reduce it to liquid tissue paper.

And it was sometime during the discussion of this film I found myself asking a question, one which pertains to (ta-DAH!) gaming: What obligation do we have for our plots to make sense?

It's a question that, the more I thought of it, the more I realized wasn't as easy to answer as I thought.

So, what are our possible answers to this question? Well, here's some I thought of.

The plot must make sense, from an absolute viewpoint. This view holds that, ideally, the plot must withstand intense scrutiny from the players, their characters, and the GM. After all, if the plot revolves around a master villain who's spent a decade hashing out all the details of his plan, then it stands to reason that he's considered just about every possible complication and contingency.

While this may seem to be the logical place for most plot-crafters to aspire, it's also (obviously) the most difficult. See, the problem is that, in most action-adventure plots -- especially those that want to seem suitably epic -- there simply aren't that many foolproof options for most villains to exploit; they either need to have relatively unambitious plans (such as robbing one bank), or they need to have lots of accomplices and help, any of whom have a reasonable chance of turning or otherwise.

The plot must make sense, but can contain aspects that can be explained away retroactively. Some plots may seem to have plot holes, but they're small enough that they can be explained away. **The plot makes some sense, but only in a vague way; the odds of success are so slim that the plot is basically illogical.** This is the tack taken by a lot of action-adventure movies with dramatic overtones, where the hero will say something along the lines of, "Did you really think you could get away with this?!" Really, every James Bond plot ever falls into this mold; the number of things that can go wrong in a standard Bondian scheme are such that, even if 007 stayed home eating nachos and playing Dreamcast, there'd still be less than a 10% chance the bad guy would succeed.

The plot doesn't need to make sense; all that's important is that *someone* thinks it makes sense. This is actually an interesting option for the gaming world, because it's something the players don't often think of; in this case, the master villain's plot can range from the slightly off-base ("If I kidnap the Prime Minister, then she'll fall in love with me!") to the completely cuckoo ("If I can kill all first-born males in the city with four-letter names, then I will be king . . . because 'king' has *four* letters!").

The plot doesn't even need to make a lick of sense to the participants. Frankly, this is a surprisingly common approach, especially in more fast-paced adventures. Most Jackie Chan movies fall into this mold, as do many adventure serials. In these tales, the villains may *seem* to have a master plan, but on some level you get the impression that not even they are buying it. A clue that the adventure might fit this description is that there is a piece of dialog that goes something like, "Don't you see?! If he gets control of the Rakahara Ruby, he'll control all drug imports on the East Coast! He's already murdered Officer Murphy; who's *next?!*" And the next scene begins with another murder, a fight for the Rakahara Ruby, or a battle on a cruise ship made entirely of drugs. A good real-world example of this is the 1966 *Batman* movie, where the master plot somehow involves using a dehydrator to dehydrate and capture world leaders to hold them for ransom . . . or something.

The advantages of this approach are numerous; the GM doesn't need to worry about making sure the plot is airtight, and can spend more time making sure the set pieces are as exciting as possible. Of course, the downsides are also considerable; it will generally be up to the GM to guide the players along, since logic and reason alone can't be relied upon to advance the plot. (Fortunately, bad guys in these stories are often klutzy with their clues: "Well, he got away; but that last punch seemed to knock something out of his pocket: a matchbook for the Tasty Tuna Undersea Bar & Grill. Let's go!") In all, I think that the sensibility of a plot is like so much of the gaming world: it doesn't much matter what the answer is, just so long as all the players know ahead of time that they're along for the same ride. Of course, that's usually the default assumption when you're on a plane with Jodie Foster.

--Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

[Irregular Webcomic](#)

The Big Box Magic Store

Inexpensive Magic Items for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Matt Riggsby

Sure, enchanted items are neat, but they're *expensive.* You can get a wand that hurls explosive fireballs or a sword that can penetrate plate armor as though it weren't there. However, that wand costs $40,000 (including the cost of a rather gaudy ruby), and the armor-ignoring sword costs over $800,000! Even lesser enchantments cost thousands. With most enchantments starting at twice the standard starting wealth of the sort of TL3 setting where most fantasy campaigns take place, what's a poor character to do?

As it turns out, the cheapest enchantments cost between $1 and $60. Only a handful of enchantments are that cheap, about 50 spells in all, and some of them aren't suitable for magical items. Tangle Growth, for example, permanently entangles an area, which is no good for the thrifty adventurer on the go. Others may not be suitable for most fantasy campaigns (say, Seek Radiation or Seek Plastic before TL6), or next to useless if they are (for example, Mature and Preserve Fuel). Still, there's a handful of enchantments which may be both useful and affordable. This article will deal with enchanted items available for $1,000 or less and how to use them.

Adjustable Clothing

This $50 enchantment may not seem particularly useful for most adventurers, but depending on how strict the GM is, it might save a fortune in clothing for some lycanthropes and other shape-changers.

Alarm

As an enchantment, Alarm costs $60 per casting. How it might be used depends on how the spell works in the campaign. The GM may rule that the alarm goes off at the same local time every day (say, every morning at the local 6:00 AM). If that's the case, a batch of alarm objects can be used for timekeeping that doesn't require a sundial or astronomy skill. Someone standing a two-hour watch knows that he can wake up the next guy and go to sleep himself when the next alarm object goes off, rather than having to guess when two hours have passed or keep an eye on the stars to figure it out. A military organization might *love* that.

However, if the alarm goes off at the same absolute time (that is, not correcting for time zones), it becomes an aid to navigation as well. For example, consider an alarm that goes off at noon. If a character with a little skill in astronomy checks the height of the sun when the alarm goes off, he'll be able to figure out how far east or west he is of where the alarm was set based on the difference between its current height and its maximum height, a feat not possible in mundane navigation until the beginning of TL 5.

Armor Enchantments

Where The Money Goes

We'll take as given the economic assumptions spelled out in *GURPS Magic:* Enchantments cost $1 per point of energy up to 60 points, then $33 per point for enchantments which take more energy than that. There's a large gap between enchantments which cost up to $60 and those which start at $2,013. Of course, much depends on assumptions. A lack of ready assistants for enchanting drives the $33 threshold down, while a higher average skill for enchanters could push it up. If, for example, master enchanters had an average skill of 24, the maximum energy for cheap enchantments would rise to 100, making a vast number of other enchantments readily available. Different pay for magicians would likewise lead to different prices. Even under the circumstances assumed in *GURPS Magic,* there'd be some fuzziness around the 60 energy point, with a number of lesser enchanters not quite able to use five assistants and a handful of highly skilled enchanters able to use more. However, since the 60 energy break point is what's in the

Slightly enhanced armor is well within the reach of the frugal adventurer. +1 to DR from Fortify is available for $50 for a full suit of armor, but anything higher than that is out of reach, and Deflect for full suits of armor is unavailable in the price range. However, since there are discounts for casting most armor enchantments on individual pieces, it's possible to build up a well-enchanted suit of armor from parts. The chart below shows the cost of affordable armor enchantments by piece (*not* including the cost of the armor itself).

Part	*Fortify* DR +1	DR +2	DR +3	*Deflect* DB 1	DB 2	DB 3
Full	$50	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Torso	$25	NA	NA	$50	NA	NA
Groin	$5	$20	$80	$10	$50	NA
Neck	$2	$5	$20	$3	$13	$50
Arms	$8	$30	NA	$15	$75	NA
Legs	$15	$60	NA	$30	NA	NA
Hands	$3	$10	$40	$5	$25	NA
Feet	$4	$15	$60	$8	$38	NA
Head	$5	$20	$80	$10	$50	NA
Skull	$3	$10	$40	$5	$25	NA
Face	$3	$10	$40	$5	$25	NA

The Lighten enchantment is also affordable for individual pieces. This chart shows the cost for enchanting individual pieces of armor for each level of weight reduction:

Part	-25%	-50%
Torso	$50	NA
Groin	$10	$20
Neck	$3	$5
Arms	$15	$30
Legs	$30	$60
Hands	$5	$10
Feet	$8	$15
Head	$10	$20
Skull	$5	$10
Face	$5	$10

Beneficial Charms

Several inexpensive protective charms are available within the price range: Amulet, Bless, and Talisman. Prices for such charms in our price range are listed in this table:

Spell	Cost
Amulet +1	$50
Bless +1	$10
Bless +2	$20
Bless +3	$30
Talisman +1	$15
Talisman +2	$45

The main drawback for these inexpensive enchantments is that they provide a limited number of uses. Amulet and Talisman are also extremely specific. However, if adventurers research their opposition well, they can pick out a few appropriate amulets and talismans to give them short-term but vital protection against their enemy's most powerful

abilities.

Cook

An enchantment allowing a cooking pot to cook one meal a day costs $30, and an enchantment cooking two meals costs $60. This is, of course, a luxury rather than vital gear, but it can be very convenient for frugal adventurers. It can save some money on long journeys, letting them cook fresh food purchased along the way rather than having to carry quantities of preserved food, and might give a small bonus to Survival rolls, since the cooking process will likely kill mundane bacteria and parasites in wild foods.

Curses

There are two "curses" available in this price range: Curse ($10 per point of penalty up to -3), and the version of the Itch enchantment which causes the bearer of an item to itch uncontrollably ($50). Stealthy characters might drop these into the pockets of enemies, although they'll fall victim to their ill effects while carrying them, so they'd best make the attempt under ideal conditions.

Darkness

Darkness ($12 per square foot up to 5 square feet) and Blackout ($15 per square foot up to 4 square feet) could be cast on long strips of rug, which could be unrolled to create a six-foot-tall barrier of blackness. They wouldn't be particularly useful in a combat situation, but they could be used to conceal small encampments at night. A group of adventurers could surround their position with Darkness or Blackout rugs. Within the perimeter of the rugs, they could cook on fires, light candles for reading, and so on, and remain essentially invisible to people outside (from a distance, anyway; the darkness doesn't stop sound).

Impression Blocker

This enchantment is available for containers holding up to three pounds at a cost of $20 per pound. Characters limited to this level of expense might not ever carry something important enough that it matters whether or not it's associated with them, but small-time smugglers might want to be sure illegal goods can't be tracked back to them.

Inscribe

For $30, characters can buy a pen or brush which leaves a mark on any solid surface without needing ink or paint. This could be useful for leaving navigation marks in underground labyrinths, outlining secret doors, and so on. Charcoal is infinitely cheaper, but an Inscribe-enchanted object could leave marks in a bright color, more visible in dim chambers and on dark backgrounds.

Knot

A one-yard length of rope may be permanently enchanted with the Knot spell at a cost of $60 (longer pieces of rope, unfortunately, cross the 60 energy threshold). It's not enough to produce a secure means of tying a climbing rope, but that should be just enough to tie someone's arms or legs, making it somewhat harder to escape from. It may also be used to more securely tie animals to a hitching post if there's a chance that they'll be stolen or try to run away themselves.

Missile Enchantments

Both Accuracy and Puissance are at a considerable discount if cast on individual arrows. It's a very high premium ($25 for each), and any more than a +1 to hit and damage takes it the cost well out of the discount price range, but a few special arrows might give an archer the edge he needs for a really important shot.

Odor

The Odor enchantment, available for $40, is cheap enough to be a popular consumer item. Socially oriented characters might carry one or two as a low-cost alternative to perfume. However, there's a potential adventuring use as well. If a character can find an enchanter who can become familiar with his own personal scent (which may require a non-human enchanter or one with spells enhancing his sense of smell), he could get an Odor-enchanted item which could be used to deceive anyone attempting to track him using scent.

Pentagram

At a cost of $1 per square foot, it's possible to create a pentagram just under six feet on a side for $60. A reasonably large pentagram could be installed on any budding magician's floor.

Preserve Food

This enchantment, $20 per pound up to three pounds of food protected, may be of little use in most circumstances, but can pad out the amount of fresh food a character can carry in harsh environments. It may be particularly useful used with the Cook enchantment.

Purify Air

An enchantment allowing the user to cast Purify Air costs $50. Poisonous gasses are rare at low TLs, but it would be very useful for clearing out smoke and could be of some use in underground chambers where the air is stale.

Seek Spells

A number of Seek spells are available for reasonable prices, listed in the chart below:

Spell	Cost
Seek Air	$60
Seek Earth	$50
Seek Fire	$50
Seek Fuel	$60
Seek Plant	$50
Seek Power	$60
Seek Water	$40

The important caveat here is that an item enchanted with Seek Earth can only find one type of earth, which is set at creation and requires a one-ounce sample. It can, therefore, be a useful tool for prospecting, but requires some forethought and perhaps significant additional cost. Depending on the price of gold, a Seek Earth tool is likely to require an additional $60 to $120 for the one-ounce sample. Although a Seek Earth tool could be set to search for silver, copper, or other metals, metals other than gold are rarely found in a native state. A prospector would be wiser to get one set to find far more plentiful ores instead of pure metals. Seek Water would be very useful for characters traveling through wilderness, perhaps giving a bonus to Survival skill in dry environments.

Skull Spirit

For the character hoping to do a little damage, this may be the most cost-effective enchantment available, at a mere $40. Skull spirits are both frightening and very difficult to kill, making them excellent for diversions and harassing attacks. Still, like many other cheap enchantments, this is another one-shot spell; the enchanted skull crumbles into dust and can't be reused. It may also be illegal to cast the spell and carry around a dangerously enchanted skull in most civilized regions.

Smoke

The Smoke enchantment, available for $50, is another good bet. A Smoke-enchanted item lets anyone (including mighty warriors, who may have plenty of fatigue to burn) put up an eye-stinging smokescreen to cover their retreat. It will, of course, be particularly useful indoors, with no wind to blow the smoke away. On the other hand, since Purify Air is a relatively cheap enchantment as well, smoke clouds may end up being dispelled quickly.

Sound Spells

Objects can be enchanted to make sounds constantly with Sound ($50) or Voices ($20 per word up to three words). Unfortunately, the Link enchantment, which could be used to turn the sounds on and off, costs far to much to use here, so adventurers using these enchantments will have to live with enchanted objects that won't shut up. However, they might be muffled by wrapping them up in the middle of any other baggage the adventurers may be carrying. They might be used as a distraction or deception. For example, an object might be enchanted with the sound of marching feet, making it sound like an out-of-sight opponent has a far larger force with him than he really does, or the sound of snoring, so that a character can slip of out his bed and sneak around at night without people listening at the door being any wiser.

Stench

The Stench enchantment, $60, produces effects similar to Smoke but even more potentially harmful. Adventurers might use Smoke if there's reason to make the cloud appear natural (or at least mundane), or Stench if they don't mind their enemies knowing that they've got at least a bit of magical ability. Again, cheap Purify Air enchantments may render this far less useful.

Stored Spells and Energy

These enchantments probably give you the most bang for your buck. Six enchantments involve charging up a small, valuable stone with mystical power for later use: Powerstone, Single College Powerstone, Manastone, Spellstone, Spell Arrow, and Blank Spell Arrow. Spellstones and Spell Arrows in particular give adventurers access to magical abilities they might not otherwise have.

There are a number of drawbacks to these items, though. Again, most are single-use. Manastones can be recharged, but only when you've got access to a moderately skilled enchanter. The second and more important factor is that the enchantments may not be expensive, but the necessary materials are. Small enchantments may be cast on tiny and relatively inexpensive stones, but the cost of the stone increases with the square of the cost, putting items with the these enchantments out of the price range of the average starting character at about seven points of energy. The chart below shows the costs for powerstones and other spell and energy-storing items which cost up to $1000.

Power	Powerstone	Manastone	Single College Powerstone	Spellstone	Spell Arrow
1	70	55	62	70	80
2	165	135	149	165	185
3	280	235	256	280	
4	425	365	393		
5	595	520	555		
6	790	700	742		
7	1000	895	944		

Teleport Shield

A small rug or bit of wood or tile no larger than a square foot can be enchanted with Teleport Shield for $50. By itself, that's hardly any protection at all. However, a series of Teleport Shield tiles might be used to pave a larger area in which no one can teleport for a reasonable price.

Touch

An item with the Touch enchantment, $50, might be used by someone not entirely confident with his Stealth skill. For example, he might come close to a sentry, use the Touch object to "tap" him on one shoulder, then quickly come up from the opposite side.

Working To Avoiding Cancellation While Avoiding Work

At the beginning of the fall season there was a promising show, the premise of which was one of the more interesting ones I'd heard in a while. It was called *Reunion,* and it had, to me, a sure-fire hook: a 20-part series, each part of which would take place in both the modern times and one year of the past, starting with 1985. The story centered around a group of five friends, one of whom was murdered on the eve of her 20-year high school reunion, supposedly by one of the others.

The show had a fair number of interesting twists and fake-outs; for example, the identity of the *victim* wasn't even revealed until the end of the fifth episode, with the first four episodes told from the point of view of the police interrogation of the friends. Unfortunately, the show's ratings were just below the 5:30AM rebroadcast of *Farmer Jed's Extreme Bass Fishing and Farm Report,* and it was canceled after nine episodes. The who in the whodunnit was entirely unrevealed (although the show's creators have shed some light on who their likely suspect was) and the whys are completely unknown.

In short, all nine fans of the show were completely cheated by the opening offering: "Stick around for 20 years of nostalgia and mayhem and a murder mystery which will, presumably, be resolved."

While I don't begrudge FOX (the show's network) its decision to stop airing the show; they have really busy schedules, mostly taken up by canceling other shows. But it does bring up a reason that I don't like to become attached to many shows: they have a habit of getting canceled.

While this doesn't affect my enjoyment of most self-contained episodic TV shows (such as the long-gone cult Nick-at-Nite series *On The Television*), it's obviously a problem for shows with any more developed story arcs. And, of course, this problem has come to plague many of my own RPG campaigns, as well as those of many other campaigns, games, and game lines. Because, when I develop a campaign outline, I'll often have a continuing arc in mind, with the seeds for plot developments and revelations dropped in that first adventure. And, just like a TV series, I've had more than my fair share of campaigns peter out after an adventure or two (for various reasons), never to meet again. And all those glorious storylines are doomed never to see the light of day.

Unfortunately, even though I'll have all these great ideas in mind, I'm still not able to do much with them when the series is over. In my case, the problem's usually two-fold. First, I'm usually in denial that a series is actually over. Second, the problem with these kind of plot nibblets is that their summation usually doesn't have much impact out of context:

"Oh, you know how the king was coughing in the first adventure? He was actually a zombie."

See, that should elicit little more than a "Huh."

Even with a bit of elaboration, it may not be much more satisfying:

"Oh, you know how the king was coughing in the first adventure? It turns out he'd died a decade ago, and was being kept alive by his necromantic adviser, unknown to all (including the king). In the sixth adventure or so, you were going to uncover the adviser's true nature, and defeat him. Unfortunately, that means the king wasn't receiving his monthly potion, and he was going to start deteriorating rapidly. This was going to set the stage for a decision on your part as to whether or not you'd dabble in necromancy to maintain the status quo."

As a player, I've faced the same problem: elaborate character backgrounds, lots of juicy secrets and plot hooks, the works . . . only to have the series end after a session or two. Sometimes, I feel like I need to provide explanations after a campaign dies: "See, my character wasn't *really* trying to steal from you; he's just under a magical compulsion by a fairy to experience something new each day, and for the most part he satisfies that urge by touching things that don't

belong to him." But, really, there almost isn't much point.

So how can you, as a GM or player, mitigate the possibilities of wasted effort, while still coming up with things that will still be sufficiently nuanced and interesting? Well, here are a few tips I use myself:

Paint in broad strokes. Really, it's usually enough (for me, at any rate) to come up with some broad ideas, and hash out specifics later (assuming there *is* a later, of course). In the case of GM plots or character backgrounds, all that's necessary to come up with is the external manifestation of what the PCs experience. In our king example above, all that's necessary to conceive is that the king is coughing, and in the character example all I need to know is that my character likes to touch stuff compulsively.

Latch on to details after the fact. If there's a trait of the adventure or character that has struck a positive chord with the players, then it's possible to make a note of that and incorporate it later. This is an even lazier option than painting in broad strokes; in this case, if you include a bit of detail about the king coughing (without any further plot in mind), and the players pick up on it and *think* it's important, then why not indulge them? And if the campaign gets canceled before then, then no real effort was wasted!

Think for the long term *and* the short term. It's not always necessary to have plot threads dangle out there that'll take a year in game time to be unwound fully. Sometimes it's enough to do the same thing. (And, of course, a successful plot that spans *two* adventures can often be revisited.) So maybe the king's necromancer makes his play for power in the second adventure, and the king's health deteriorates in the third. The shorter the timeframe, the greater a chance of seeing the plot to fruition. And, of course, making sure each adventure is as self-contained as possible will do a lot to keep the pieces satisfying even if the greater whole isn't contained by the group.

Regardless of how this thorny problem is tackled, it's possible to have long-term story ideas without having those ideas lost if the campaign doesn't last. Just make sure you don't tell the executives at FOX about your game; it'll never make it past a month.

--Steven Marsh

The Cannibal at the North End of the World

by Bevan Thomas

In many fantasy stories and roleplaying games, deities, spirits, and such creatures are polarized into camps of good and evil with clear distinctions made between the two. However, the relationship between the human and supernatural worlds is often far more complex in mythology, requiring people to achieve an understanding with the dark primal forces that surround them.

Such a force is Baxbakwalanuxsiwae, a mighty spirit that haunts the legends of the Kwakiutl people of British Columbia, Canada (and is comparable to the Algonquin ice giant Wendigo). His name has been translated as "Cannibal at the North End of the World," "He Who is First to Eat Man at the Mouth of the River," and simply "Cannibal." To most, he is a being of terror, sweeping down from the cold north hungry for human flesh. However, to those who know his sacred rites, he is also a source of knowledge and power.

This powerful spirit is appropriate for any campaign where such beings control aspects of human existence. Though a creature of Kwakiutl folklore, the Cannibal can easily be adapted to other cosmologies, presenting an unexpected source of danger and knowledge to those who stumble upon the enigmatic entity.

Baxbakwalanuxsiwae   *1,388 points*

Age indeterminate; 9'; 1,000 lbs. In his true form, the Cannibal resembles a bear, with a hunched-over body covered in dark, tangled fur. However, his face is that of an ogre, with burning red eyes and huge tusks. Most hideous of all are the gaping, bloodstained mouths that cover his body. They speak in unison when the Cannibal talks, creating a ghoulish choir. He is usually naked unless dressed in his shape-shifting cloaks (see below).

Attributes: **ST** 25 [250]; **DX** 14 [80]; **IQ** 18 [360]; **HT** 14 [40].

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 2d+2/5d-1; BL 125; HP 25 [0]; Will 21 [15]; Per 21 [15]; FP 14 [0]; Basic Speed 7 [0]; Basic Move 7 [0].

Advantages: Alternate Form (hokhiku; can be stolen 10%) [26]; Alternate Form (raven; keeps IQ; can be stolen 10%) [14]; Discriminatory Smell [15]; Humanoid Man-Eater [29]; Jump (world, only to and from Spirit World -60%) [40]; Possession (spiritual -20%) [80]; Speak with Animals [25]; Spirit [261]; Temperature Tolerance 10 (cold) [10]; Terror (hearing, -3 to fright checks) [60].

Disadvantages: Bloodlust (12) [-10]; Callous [-5]; Code of Honor (Hospitality) [-5]; Curious (12) [-5]; Frightens Animals [-10]; Gluttony (9) [-7]; Needs to Eat and Drink [-10]; Odious Personal Habit (Eats other sapients) [-15]; Restricted Diet (Fresh Meat) [-10]

Quirks: Always calls out "Hap! Hap!" when attacking; Proud [-2]

Languages: Haisla (Accented) [4]; Heiltsuk-Oowekyala (Native) [6]; Kwak'wala (Accented) [4]; Spirit Tongue (Native) [0]

Skills: Area Knowledge (Pacific Northwest Coast)-18 [1]; Area Knowledge (Spirit World)-18 [1]; Brawling-17 [8]; Dancing-14 [2]; Detect Lies-21 [4]; Diplomacy-17 [2]; Fast-Talk-18 [2]; Gambling-18 [2]; Herb Lore-18 [8]; Hidden Lore (Spirit Lore)-20 [8]; Intimidation-21 [2]; Literature (Pacific Northwest Coast)-18 [2]; Meditation-20 [2]; Musical Instrument (Whistle)-17 [2]; Naturalist-18 [4]; Navigation (Air)-18 [2]; Observation-21 [2]; Occultism-20 [8]; Public Speaking-18 [2]; Religious Ritual (Kwakiutl)-18 [4]; Ritual Magic (Pepaxalai)-18 [8]; Singing-15 [2]; Sleight of Hand-13 [2]; Stealth-16 [8]; Survival (Arctic)-21 [2]; Survival (Woodlands)-20 [1]; Symbol Drawing (Pepaxalai)-18 [4]; Teaching-15 [2]*; Theology (Kwakiutl)-18 [4]; Tracking-21 [2] *Includes 3 for Callous

Humanoid Man-Eater   *29 points*

The natural form of the Cannibal.

Secondary Characteristics: SM+1

Advantages: Claws (sharp) [5], DR 3 (skin) [9]; Extra Mouths (all over the body) [50]; Fur [1]; Penetrating Voice [1]; Teeth (fangs) [2]

Disadvantages: Disturbing Voice (ghoulish choir) [-10]; Horrific Appearance [-24], Semi-Upright [-5]

Hokhiku   *45 points*

When hunting, the Cannibal dons his transformation mask and cloak of feathers, and takes on the form of the hokhiku. This creature is a bird with a long, thin beak, feathers as black as night, and a wingspan of 60 feet. Its voice is similar to the hooting of an owl, though the words of the Cannibal's hunting cry can still be made out. He uses the hokhiku's beak to crush his prey's skulls in order to consume their brains.

Secondary Characteristics: SM+1

Advantages: Acute Vision 3 [6], Claws (talons) [8], Enhanced Move 1 (Air Speed 28) [20]; Flight (winged -25%) [30], Night Vision 5 [5], Penetrating Voice [1]; Silence 3 [15]; Teeth (sharp beak) [1]

Disadvantages: Disturbing Voice (echoing croak) [-10]; No Fine Manipulators [-30]

Biography

Deep in the Spirit World, at the North End of the World, there is a huge mountain trapped in an eternal blizzard, its pine trees forever buried in snow. This mountain is known as Naualakum (Supernatural-Face-Mountain), and it is on its slopes that the Cannibal makes his home. His lodge resembles a longhouse such as those found in the villages of the Pacific Northwest Coast, but it is of massive size and the smoke that constantly billows from its chimney is red as blood. The inside of the longhouse is always covered with red-cedar bark, and usually smells of cooked meat. For much meat must be cooked to fill the Cannibal's great belly.

Baxbakwalanuxsiwae shares his home with his wife Qominaga. She is the one who usually prepares the bloody meals with the assistance of her slave Kinqalalala. Though Qominaga appears similar to her husband, she is usually dressed in red and white cedar bark, and is more domestically inclined (her skills focus more on cooking and housekeeping than on hunting). Her powers are more-or-less identical, and she even possesses similar shapeshifting cloaks. The few times that Qominaga goes hunting, she takes the form of the gelogudzayae ("crooked-beak-of-heaven"), a large bird with a strange hooked beak (and stats comparable to that of the hokhiku).

A long time ago, a young Kwakiutl man wished to know the secrets of the Spirit World, and so he set out to find Baxbakwalanuxsiwae and learn from him. After overcoming countless hardships, the man finally arrived at Naualakum and presented himself to the Cannibal. The spirit was impressed by the man's dedicated, courage, and cunning, and as a reward, possessed him. This drove the man insane, and he ran screaming back to his village, hungry for human flesh. Eventually, the man managed to regain his sanity, resist the hunger, and even learned how to channel the spirit's power. The man became a prominent pepaxalai (a shaman, literally "powerful one"), and the creator of the Hamatsa cult, a secret society dedicated to the veneration of the Cannibal and the channeling of his power.

Motivations

Above all, the thing that motivates Baxbakwalanuxsiwae is hunger. He craves fresh meat, particularly the flesh of humans and other sapient beings, and is absolutely merciless in getting it. He is a very wise spirit, and when not eating, usually spends his time in contemplation and the pursuit of knowledge. He is venerated by a mystic order known as the Hamatsa, and is pleased by their rituals, which serve to pacify him and decrease his hunger for flesh. However, not even the Hamatsa can stave off his hunger for long, and the Cannibal must always return to the hunt.

Encountered

The mortal world is usually too warm during the spring and summer months for a creature who has made its home at the North End of the World. Therefore the Cannibal only goes hunting in the mortal world during autumn and winter (making due with much less filling spirit prey during the warmer months). When leaving his home, he dons a transformation mask and magic cloak of black feathers, exchanging his bear-like form for that of a bird's. Depending upon which mask and cloak he takes, the Cannibal will fly off as either a raven or the hokhiku bird. The raven is used for spying, reconnaissance, and to feast on fresh carrion (in this form, Baxbakwalanuxsiwae has a taste for eyes). The hokhiku is used for hunting.

The Cannibal prefers to hunt at night, particularly during storms, and will fly through the night, almost invisible against the night sky until he detects worthy prey. Then he comes down like a thunderbolt, calling out his hunting cry in a bizarre, twisted voice. The cry is "Hap! Hap!" which means "Eating! Eating!" Those who hear the horrible cry and see Baxbakwalanuxsiwae bearing down upon them are often paralyzed with fear, allowing the Cannibal to devour them at his leisure.

If he is feeling particularly hungry, then the Cannibal will consume his prey's eyes and brain then and there, leaving the ruined carcass for scavengers. However, the Cannibal prefers to simply stun his victim, and carry the unconscious prey off in his talons back to the slopes of Naualakum and to Qominaga's stew-pot.

When full, or at least less ravenous than usual, Baxbakwalanuxsiwae is contemplative and inquisitive. He often tests those he encounters, presenting them with challenges to see if they are worthy of knowledge or mystic advice. The Cannibal will temporarily possess those he deems particularly worthy, transforming them into hamatsa. Though this can be an opportunity to learn much, it is also dangerous in the extreme. For unless the people are the Cannibal's guests in his lodge (and thus protected by the laws by hospitality), he would feel no compunction about devouring them should he get hungry. However, he is impressed by courage and ingenuity, and if particularly impressed by a person's bravery and cunning, Baxbakwalanuxsiwae may decide to seek prey elsewhere.

Variations

Though Baxbakwalanuxsiwae is presented as an ambiguous figure by the Kwakiutl, some nearby Native groups portray him as entirely malevolent. For example, in an Owikeno legend, the Cannibal kidnaps a chief's daughter and forces her to be his wife. After the chief's sons rescue their sister, he invites the Cannibal into his lodge for dinner and then pushes the creature into a concealed fire-pit. After the Cannibal is completely burned, his ashes transform into the first mosquitoes, creatures that will feed on humanity forever. Such a creature is a clear-cut threat, a monster the PCs can battle without misgivings. This version of the Cannibal would lack the Curious disadvantage, probably possessing Sadism instead.

Hamatsa   *30 points*

Advantages: Blessed [10]; Channeling [10]; Medium [10]; Patron (the Cannibal, 6 or less) [10]; Reputation +3 (with all people who respect the Hamatsa, recognized sometimes) [4].

Disadvantages: Bloodlust (12) [-10]; Duty (performing the Hamatsa rituals) [-5]; Gluttony (12) [-5].

Skills: Hidden Lore (Spirit Lore) (A) IQ [2]; Religious Ritual (Kwakiutl) (H) IQ -1 [2]; Theology (Kwakiutl) (H) IQ-1 [2].

Variant: If the GM wishes for the Hamatsa's powers to instead be represented by magical spells, then replace the supernatural advantages with skill in Ritual Magic (Pepaxalai) and Symbol Drawing (Pepaxalai) and add levels of Ritual Magery. Mages who invoke the power of the Cannibal would likely favor spells from the paths of Animal, Communication and Empathy, Food, Knowledge, and Necromancy.

A long, long time ago, a young man was brave enough to travel to the North End of the World and petition Baxbakwalanuxsiwae to grant him power. Once the man regained his sanity, he taught to others the secrets that the Cannibal had taught him, and thus was the Hamatsa, the Cult of the Cannibal, formed. A secret society dedicated to pacifying and channeling the Cannibal spirit.

Anyone wishing to join the society must first stay in the wilderness for four days. If found worthy of membership, he is possessed by Baxbakwalanuxsiwae and driven temporarily insane. On the fourth day, the initiate runs back into the village in a frenzied state, biting anyone he can reach. He must be lured inside the Hamatsa's sacred longhouse (representing an integration of the Cannibal Spirit with the village and its inhabitants), where he is forced to participate in a ritual dance and must then consume and disgorge large quantities of salt water and raw meat. As the initiate vomits forth the meat, he cleanses himself of most of his insanity, while still retaining the Cannibal's power.

The Hamatsa perform dances during the Kwakiutl winter ceremonies. The dances reenact the adventures of their mythic founder and serve to both pacify Baxbakwalanuxsiwae and draw upon his strength and wisdom. They are an attempt to balance the civilized human world with the gluttonous savagery of the wilderness. They also allow the people to participate in the cycle of predator and prey that embodies the natural world, providing purification for all present.

When not participating in these ceremonies, the Hamatsa serve as intermediaries between the material and spirit worlds, seeking to balance the needs of the spirits with the needs of the tribe. They also receive visions that assist them in their duties as advisors. However, this power comes at a price, for each hamatsa must wrestle with the gluttonous nature that the Cannibal has instilled in him.

The Cannibal in the Campaign

Baxbakwalanuxsiwae is most obviously appropriate for a Horror, Illuminated, or other kind of setting in which characters explore variations of real-world legends and ghost stories. However, he could be transplanted to a Fantasy campaign with ease: the Cannibal could be affiliated with some tribal culture akin to the Kwakiutl, or be entirely on his own, his lodge on some isolated mountain, waiting for a group of adventurers to stumble upon him.

The most obvious use for the Cannibal is as a villain, with the PCs struggling to stop the spirit from pursuing any more prey. However, another possibility is for him to possess knowledge or capabilities that the characters require, forcing them to try and strike a bargain with Baxbakwalanuxsiwae. This bargain may entail some difficult task (such as scaling Naualakum or beating the Cannibal in an arm-wrestling match), or might even require that a PC be possessed by him.

Depending upon the situation, the Hamatsa could serve as patrons, allies, or enemies for the PCs. They are sources of spiritual knowledge and wield a lot of power in their tribal communities, as well as being some of the few people able to mollify the Cannibal. This would make them useful friends, and even more dangerous foes.

Further Reading

- Bierhorst, John. *Mythology of North America.*
- McDowell, Jim. *Hamatsa.*
- Walens, Stanley. *Feasting with Cannibals.*

Social Treasures

for the *d20 System*

by Lloyd Brown III

Familiarity breeds contempt . . . even if it's gold and shiny. Creating new and interesting ways of rewarding characters besides yet another round of gold coins is always a challenge for a Dungeon Master.

Offering characters unusual equipment or monster body parts helps offer a little variety from time to time, but that leads to rampant cases of packrat-ism: characters buy huge transport devices so that they can return an entire dungeon's contents back to town for sale. Unusual goods are a stopgap measure on the path to interesting treasures.

Social treasures, on the other hand, not only solve questions of portability, but they carry prestige. A single diamond, once spent, is gone. A seat on the town council provides the character with bragging rights and adventure opportunity for much longer.

Social treasures have no meaning outside of a society, so they might not be appropriate for all campaigns. Pure dungeon-crawling campaigns, where cities exist only for the conversion of loot into gold, will find little use. On the other hand, in urban-based campaigns, in which most activity takes place within a town or city, social treasures encourage roleplaying around them.

The best way for a DM to use social treasures is as a reward for accomplishing a mission rather than as items found in a hoard. The DM can use them to augment a fair treasure gained during an adventure, or offer only very light treasure in the course of the adventure, relying on social treasures for the bulk of the party's reward for that story. Attaching a value to these incentives, which many DMs use already, helps keep the heroes' buying power in line with their level.

Characters may not sell social treasures. If they choose not to accept them, or if they decide they no longer want them, they usually revert back to the person who gifted them. Characters who abuse their privileges may find them revoked.

Room and Board

Self-sufficient (less than 50 gp): Free provisions of this level might include the right to stay in an inn's stable or use an old tool shed that the character might be able to repair into a suitable lodging with sufficient time and effort.

Meager (75 gp): Meager provisions generally offer the same boarding options as the self-sufficient lodging, but it supplements it with the occasional meal and a helping hand with the laundry, sewing and other mundane chores.

Poor (150 gp): Poor room and board might include a room in a small cottage or a boarding house, although the character probably shares bathing facilities. The character can count on solid (if tasteless) meals, as well as feed for one mount or animal companion.

Common (500 gp): Private rooms are standard, including bath. Such boarding is comparable to a small manse or rectory and is either on church grounds or inside the local lord's keep. The character can afford the space to house a guest, a servant, or a spouse. The character's mount is both fed and groomed and even maintained in the character's absence reasonably well.

Good (1,500 gp): With a good lifestyle, the character can afford to go to the theater, eat in popular restaurants, and ride in a coach on special occasions. The food is good and plentiful. The housing is private, fairly secure against common thieves, and both spacious and attractive enough to entertain a moderate number of guests on regular occasions.

Extravagant (2,500 gp): An extravagant lifestyle allows for epicurean eating, wanton purchases of new clothes or other niceties, frequent professional entertainment for a large number of guests, and a generous gift budget. Housing is spacious, with a pleasant view, and in a safe location. Servants attend to every domestic need.

Private Residence

City Home, Common (1,000 gp): A typical small city home with three rooms has no decoration, merely functional chairs, a hard bed and a smoky stove. Curtains divide the rooms and the place is not very private. It could be an apartment or part of a row of similar homes, but it probably isn't freestanding. Its construction ranges from daub and wattle to mud brick to thin wood and thatch.

City Home, Good (5,000 gp): This home is a sturdy freestanding building of stone, brick, or wood. It has two or more private bedrooms, a separate kitchen and might have a distinct storage area, such as an attic or a basement. It might include a small exterior building as well -- a workshop, an outhouse, or both. The home contains more generous furnishings, but the space could still use a few hundred gold pieces' worth of customization.

City Home, Wealthy (25,000 gp or more): This home features multiple stories, spacious rooms, and comfortable furnishings. This treasure includes glass windows, padded chairs, thick rugs, and locking doors. Maintenance for this home requires that a character spend Extravagant upkeep (if this treasure includes that upkeep, add the two values together).

Tax Breaks

Toll Exemption (25 gp): Tolls are annoying and constant fees that characters face when they travel. They pay to use roads, they pay to use bridges, they pay to use ferries. If they ride mounts to hurry on their way, they pay extra for those. Although the cost of these tolls is minor in each case, their total is burdensome to the frequent traveler. A character with this benefit pays no tolls within its granting authority's lands.

One-time Exemption (variable value): A one-time exemption allows the character access to a certain right without paying for that right. The most common right that PCs desire is the right to carry weapons, although others include the right to operate a church, cast spells in public, or other rights the nobility don't want in the hands of commoners. A typical value ranges from 25 gp to 150 gp.

Tax Exemption (750 gp): The character is exempted from certain fees and taxes. One simple way to implement this benefit is to reduce the upkeep of Common, Good, or Extravagant lifestyles by 20 gold pieces per month. If you apply it to specific taxes as part of a detailed management of character finances, then the value of this reward varies.

Servants

Servant, household (150 gp): The services of a household servant are a mark of distinction in most societies. They remove the burden of household chores from a character and allow that character more time to pursue adventuring opportunities without worrying about mundane issues like cooking and cleaning. Specific servants include cooks, grooms, maids, butlers, porters, laborers, and messengers.

Hireling, skilled (500 gp): This servant might be a craftsman, a scribe, or other character with a useful skill. Instead of plying a trade for a livable wage, the NPC works for the character. Examples include armorers, hunters, tutors, blacksmiths, potters, weavers, musicians, or other bastions of society.

Hireling, expert (2,000 gp): The services of these hirelings are in high demand. While fully capable of working on their own and earning a comfortable living, they also pledge their services to prominent clerics, powerful nobles, or successful merchants. They include architects, spies, alchemists, cartographers, sages, stewards, and diplomats.

Lands & Rights

Farm Income (variable value): The character gains a plot of land. Additionally, serfs or slaves work the land and turn over the income. While the character must allow the workers a share of the crops, the land generates wealth for the character.

This benefit is not coins -- the farmers do not dig up gold coins out of the ground. This reward might be wheat, corn, rice, barley, or alfalfa. This treasure is not one that characters can carry around for the purpose of bribing monsters they find in dungeons. They can spend it locally in return for alchemical equipment, armor or weapons, mounts and other mundane gear (including spell components) and services.

The value of this right is 36 times the monthly income. Thus, if the monthly income is 50 gp, the value of the right is 1,800 gp. Unlike some other social rewards, the character might be able to trade this right in exchange for other goods or services.

Mining Rights (variable value): The character retains the right to keep a certain amount of the wealth to come out of a mine. The mine could be useful metals, precious metals, or some kind of gemstone. The character must turn over the bulk of the proceeds to the sovereign (who owns the land and, therefore, the minerals in it as well), and rulers do not care for deceit.

Mining rights yield returns in coin, not in product. The value of the mining right is 50 times the value of the monthly yield, so a mine that grants its owner 100 gp per month is worth 5,000 gp.

Tax Rights (variable value): Tolls for passage on a road or a stretch of river have vaulted some characters into stratospheric wealth. This gift includes a handful of armed guards whose duty extends only to collecting tolls. Misusing this armed servants could be a serious legal violation that could have this privilege revoked and could land the character in serious legal trouble.

Tax rights are worth 50 times their monthly yield.

Business Share (variable value): This reward describes partial ownership in a shipping company, a trading house, a bank, or some other commercial institution. The character is assumed to be a minority owner, capable of drawing an income but not actively involved in the business's operation.

A business share is worth 50 times its average monthly yield.

Titles

Low Official (150 gp for a one-year term or 1,500 gp for a life-long term): This general office encompasses tax collectors, bailiffs, aldermen, sheriffs, and other officials of various rank and prestige. Not restricted just to government, this category includes church officials such as curates and abbots, low-ranking military officers and lesser university positions as well.

Specific duties and privileges vary, but this treasure class assumes that the official draws a salary in coin and has a certain amount of perks such as servants, clothing, and room and board included. The position might be for a certain term, or it might be for life. For positions such as aldermen or bailiffs, the character is guaranteed the position for a year, and then must continue to earn it somehow (either by exercising ranks in an appropriate Profession or by earning more social treasures from the city's leaders).

A Low Official must maintain at least Common upkeep.

A Low Official gains a +1 circumstance bonus to Charisma checks made in the community in which he has authority. This bonus applies to Charisma checks and to Charisma-based skill checks such as Diplomacy and Bluff, but it only applies to people part of the community that celebrated the characters. Thus, it applies to Diplomacy checks made to

convince the councilman to allow a PC cleric to open up a local temple, but it doesn't apply to Bluff checks made to feint against a monster in the dungeon just outside of town.

High Official (3,000 gp): This position might include a member of a city council in a large city, or it might include a key position in a large town (such as a portmaster or a judge); comparable civil positions include university deans and guildmasters. High Officials can appoint other characters (including other PCs) to Low Official positions once per year.

All of these positions assume a lifelong posting. The character can still lose the position due to scandal or misdeed but need not fear loss due to competition or the advancement of underlings.

A High Official must maintain at least Good upkeep.

A High Official gains a +2 circumstance bonus to Charisma checks made in the community in which he has authority.

Town Mayor (7,500 gp): Obviously, the Town Mayor's power and prestige fluctuate with the government structure, the Town Mayor's personal competence, and the size of the town he oversees. This position assumes near-total control over the character's purview, subject only to review afterward. Town Mayors subject to strict supervision from a strong town council should be considered High Officials instead.

In addition to stipend and social benefits, the Town Mayor is immune to persecution for minor violations of the law. On the other hand, the Town Mayor is subject to very severe punishment for major violations. If the mayor assaults the noble who owns the land the town stands on, the town will soon have a new mayor -- whose first duty might be to preside over the funeral of the old mayor.

A Town Mayor must maintain at least Good upkeep.

A Town Mayor may appoint other characters (including other PCs) to Low Official positions once per month. The Town Mayor can appoint a High Official once per year.

A Town Mayor gains a +4 circumstance bonus to Charisma checks made in the community in which he has authority.

City Mayor (15,000 gp): A city mayor has the duties and privileges of a town mayor, but his income and influence reach further. Like a Town Mayor, the City Mayor may appoint other characters (including other PCs) to Low Official positions once per month. The City Mayor may appoint a High Official once per year.

A City Mayor gains a +4 circumstance bonus to Charisma checks made in the community in which he has authority.

A City Mayor must maintain at least Good upkeep.

Knighthood (5,000+ gp): A knighthood is a player favorite among social rewards. Should a character earn a knighthood, the situation calls for far more air time than simply writing the reward down on a character sheet. The reward should call for a high praise, the subservience of peasants, and a fair amount of description of the ceremony itself. It might be worth devoting an entire gaming session to the details surrounding this award.

The knight gains certain rights: namely, the right to travel freely, the right to bear arms and armor, the right to own land, the right of a title and formal form of address, and possible others depending on the campaign. In terms of other social treasures, the knight gains the services of a household servant, a skilled servant, at least Poor room and board (but usually Good), and toll exemption. A knight might or might not own land; if so, he gains farm income as a separate benefit. The ceremony celebrating the character's knighthood is considered a Holiday for the benefits it bestows.

The knight is also obligated to provide service to his lord by an oath of fealty. In addition to his own service, he might be required to provide a certain number of men-at-arms from the lands he controls.

A knighthood is not hereditary; the children of knights are freemen, not knights.

Noble titles beyond knighthood require detail beyond the scope of this article.

Guild Dues

Guild Dues, Minor (50 gp): This gift pays the character's guild dues for a year. The character is still responsible for meeting eligibility requirements, attending meetings, and following regulations. If the reward pays for lifetime membership, the value is 1,000 gp.

Guild Dues, Major (1,000 gp): This reward pays for annual guild dues for a guild that provides free character training as part of its services if the DM uses that option. If the reward pays for a lifetime membership, its value is 20,000 gp.

Fun Stuff

Holiday (250 gp): Holidays are not always formal scheduled events. The ruler and his lesser delegates have the authority to spontaneously order a holiday when the common people need a break. Holidays are good for cooling off tempers, slowing down the progress of internal rivals, and improving morale.

In the case of a holiday aimed at rewarding characters, the characters are praised by the town worthies, and stuffed with food and wine, plied with gifts, entertained with dancers and musicians, and otherwise treated like royalty. Activities might include feasts, parades, or decadent parties that last long into the night.

Characters treated to a holiday gain a +4 bonus to Charisma checks during the holiday (it might last longer than one day), and a +2 bonus to Charisma checks for another week.

Medal (750 gp): Quite different in tone from the holiday, the awarding of a medal is usually a solemn affair, reminding the principals of the often traumatic event through which they earned it.

The character gains a +1 bonus to Charisma checks among characters that know about the medal's importance.

Favor (variable value): Players love favors. With the fantasy world equivalent of a blank check, an NPC who says "I owe you one" usually comes to regret it. Instead of arbitrarily cutting the player characters off when they come back once too often, assign a value to the favor. For example, a favor worth 200 gp might mean that the character loans the party a horse without any expectation of its return. Providing a gold piece value to the reward ahead of time takes some of the mystery out of this player favorite, but subtlety can keep much of the feel. The players can make a Gather Information check to learn what the NPC is capable of and how great his gratitude has extended in the past. In this way, you can justify the out-of-character knowledge of the favor's value.

The Mmorn Commune

by Nick Grant

Just south of some ancient and honorable kingdom, in the heart of some green-forested and blue-laked continent, a dark territory is growing at an unsettling pace. The Mmorn Commune is incorporating bits and pieces of the surrounding nations and building itself up to be a major power. The undead which populate it aren't mindless shambling hordes or vampiric noblemen, but a rhetoric spilling race of intelligent communists, united under a mutual magical transformation.

History

Jacob Mmorn, a communist and a necromancer, had grown disgusted with the state of the world. Everywhere he looked, monarchies oppressed peasants, serfs starved while lords grew fat, and armies of the poor marched as meat-shields for elite, wealthy cavalry. From atop his tower Mmorn pondered the world's problems, postulating and meditating until he finally arrived at the inevitable conclusion: living sentients were not able to sustain a just government.

There were no power plays among the pigs, no elite cows. The sheep didn't slaughter each other over trivial matters and the wolves only killed for food. And, perhaps most importantly, the mindless human servants that roamed the halls of his laboratories and ritual chambers never spurned each other. Zombies represented humanity in its most perfect state -- a simple harmony seemed to saturate their society. This line of thinking inspired the necromancer and set him to working-modifying the zombie spells to create a more perfect beast. He was not, after all, so insane yet as to believe that the roving mindless undead could actually form a functional society, and even if they *were,* he had no desire to become one himself.

He began to recruit experimental subjects from the local populace. The original zombie formula was too mindless, too droning to actually conduct any of the higher aspects of humanity -- but he had to retain at the same time the simplicity which drove the need for the experiment in the first place. A few failed attempts, a few more household servants, and he finally saw a fantastic new possibility. Mmorn took a young, strong boy and removed his brain. Then, inscribing runic spells all over it, he covered it in an alchemically prepared paste and let it sit for a single month. After that time had elapsed, he took the brain and ate it himself.

The days that followed were pain-ridden. Intense internal restructuring and transformation through a death-like state took a serious toll on his body, but he was able to maintain his will and conviction throughout. After nearly eight days of delirium, everything snapped back into focus. Jacob Mmorn could feel his body as vibrantly as he ever had, but also felt an alien presence. The innocent and frightened voice of a fifteen year old boy gibbered in some corner of his mind. Much more intensely though, he felt a burning and obsessive lust for more brains.

Three more days passed while the necromancer battled the new wills in his head. The boy was easy to incorporate into his larger personality, but the hunger for brains battered his consciousness. He finally determined that it was impossible to fully resist, and began bringing others into his lab, only to be licking clean their cranial cavity an hour later.

With the new meals came new personalities. The rush of new wills to battle almost drowned the necromancer out entirely, but by utilizing the mental power that came with his magical training he was able to dominate the internal struggle. Another interesting development began to take place -- the brainless corpses he had discarded began to rise, clamoring for food of their own. After a month of the zombies feeding on new bodies and all undergoing an internal struggle of their own, Mmorn was left with a tower full of restless undead all on the edge of cannibalism (though some of the older ones had started to develop unique personalities of their own, all of them felt the same brain-lust that had plagued their progenitor). He did the only thing he felt he could do -- he opened his gates.

The following month was terrible for the town, but a golden age for the wave of zombies. The number of brainless

corpses (or hollow ones, as they would come to be known) started increasing exponentially, and the first cases of brain-starvation cropped up. The magician himself became more and more saturated with personalities and wills, and started to experience some psychic spill-over.

The society within the town quickly stratified. Those who had consumed the most brains, and who had started to manifest psychic powers, rose to the top while the hollow ones and those still struggling with streamlining a single persona sifted to the bottom. This social evolution set a precedent that would be repeated through the rise of the nation.

It wasn't long after the city was entirely consumed by the transforming disease that they realized the impending necessity of trade or war. Those competent enough to carry on conversation argued that, while slaves could bring in more brains, this wouldn't be nearly as quick as war. However, as slaves and war were not mutually exclusive options, both enterprises were embarked upon. The cannibal armies swept through the surrounding areas and established a a territory firmly in zombie control.

However, as the more powerful caste consumed more insight and power, they began to understand that they had no sustainable source of brains. A family of slaves might be able to produce new brains at a very slow rate (it took 13 years for a specimen to reach maturity), but a zombie needed at least one brain a day to stay healthy.

This led to the founding of the first free slave city. These glorified breeding grounds were considered a reward for loyal slaves -- though they were regularly pillaged for food, the living sentients there could live out their lives with a modicum of privacy and a thin hope to survive another day. The group of zombie cities and feeder slave cities formed a county, a unit that would be repeated several times over as the Commune expanded its territory.

Society

The social structure of the Mmorn Commune exemplifies the oppressive power structures its founder abhorred. The essential superiority of elders, the expendability of the lower class and a struggling middle class all typified the Commune's political thought.

It wasn't all bad though -- there was a relatively democratic ascension through the social classes, and a flurry of dialog around the topic of whether individual vessels ought even be considered when discussing how fairly an individual is treated. Certainly in the higher ranks a single complex individual was bound to a body, but the hollow and the mad were dominated by forces that no one person could take credit for. As the conservative element put it, the eventual fate of half the actual persons consumed was to end up in some ruler's head, helping to run the government itself.

The zombie society subsequently split into four classes.

The Slaves

These humans and humanoids were either bought or captured. Imported into deeper zombie territory and regularly slaughtered for their nutritional content, slaves have no rights, and are treated as animals. Zombies are never slaves themselves, and it is rare that a slave will be killed in such a way that the curse is transmitted to him (usually the brain is surgically removed, as opposed to being eaten straight out of the individual).

The Hollow and the Mad

The lowest of the three classes, the Hollow and the Mad are grouped together only by status -- they represent two distinct socio-magical groups. The Hollow are newly created undead. These creatures have just had their brains eaten by some other zombie and thus have no guiding will of their own. The will, personality, and direction that they had was consumed by whomever ate them, and they've become an empty vessel, carrying only the instructions of the disease which animates them -- *seek more brains.* These shambling beasts are incapable of serving any functions other than soldier, and really don't desire to.

This position is often referred to in the political rhetoric of the zombie philosophers as the ideal position for one of the Commune. They have no personal ambition except to devour, which is the uniting point for the Commune. They represent the ultimate equality, as they are a phase through which all (save Jacob) passed to gain fraternity with the rest of the Commune.

However, as the Commune evolves, the bureaucrats become less concerned with the plight of the lower classes -- and the rift between them and the upper class grows ever wider. Lately zombies who consumed as many as four or five brains are referred to as hollow, while previously it had been a technical term to refer to those totally without will.

While a zombie is consuming his first brains, an important mental battle takes place. The first of their kind, Jacob Mmorn, had passed this test with relative ease, being a magician of exceptional will. However, as the empty vessels fill themselves up with brains (often paying no attention to what brains they are getting), some of them succumb to a peculiar madness. It is very difficult for some people to get used to a new body . . . much less a new body that has a burning desire for cannibalism and is populated with several wills just as powerful as his own. The spell effect that incurs the brain-hunger does help the personalities mesh and reform into something greater, but some inevitably crack, and those are the mad.

Either because they can't stand the thought of sharing control of a body or they simply have too many personal hang-ups to be integrated into something larger, some elements of this zombie simply don't mesh. They grind and clank like unfitting gears, eventually bringing down the whole machine. These incoherent madmen are hunted by a few members of zombie society, and their brains and essences treated for re-entry into some stronger beings.

For both of these low status classes, existence is war-filled and trying. However, if they are able to survive with a modicum of sanity, they might be able to ascend to a middle class position.

Merchants and Artisans

The hefty middle class of the Mmorn Commune mostly concerns itself with the consumption of brains. Whereas in human, elven, or dwarven culture you find myriad diversions to satisfy the urges to eat, sleep, and procreate, zombie culture is dominated by dealing with the consumption of brains. Some zombies may indulge in the arts, but all that truly matters to the large majority is the ability to find a next meal. This can be especially difficult for zombies deep in zombie-controlled territory.

Zombie art is very disturbing to those outside the Commune. Grotesque masterpieces usually deal with the themes of losing ones humanity, incorporating smaller elements into a larger whole, or the triumph of power and will over an adverse universe. An appreciation for art is noted, by the philosophers and social commentators (who admittedly, usually have a snobbish love for art themselves) as being the first sign that a zombie is becoming transcendent.

The Transcendent

After incorporating a large number of brains, the zombie starts to act a little differently. If he's managed to retain his sanity, then by this point he's got a large reservoir of psychic energy which will bend to the command of the single emergent personality.

This begins to manifest as especially acute senses and an obsessive tendency to philosophize. The extra energy naturally flows to these channels -- interpreting smell more distinctly or bending the range of his eyes to give glimpses of new colors in the infrared spectrum. The implications and ramifications of political, metaphysical, or magical actions are all a little clearer, a little easier to deduce. The zombie undergoes a sort of enlightenment that allows him to understand how the world works more clearly with each brain he eats.

A few quirks have arisen out of this circumstance. Older zombies become more picky about the brains they incorporate, and will often grow disdainful of the lower classes eating so indiscriminately. Others however, lash out at this snobbishness, embracing the visceral pleasures of eating a fresh brain straight out of a head, and becoming very self-aware monsters. Others still take up the plight of the lower classes without overidentifying with them -- trying to

represent them to the local decision making bodies. On the upper end, the transcendent develop keen psychic powers, which will be outlined later.

Culture

It's rare that a young zombie, once he's developed a persona, will stay much longer in the military. There's a good chance there that he'll devour some stubborn brain, and a possibility that he'll be entirely ripped apart and destroyed. A number of jobs have sprung up among the true middle class that allow them to consume safer brains in a safer environment. The absolute bottom rung jobs are mostly physical labor -- mining mines, chopping down forests, etc. A few jobs deal directly with getting and preparing new brains to be eaten by non-military zombies.

Slave traders hold an important position in zombie society. They take the few exports the zombie commune naturally comes across and barters with conquering nations for slaves. Since the politics of the country don't allow for personal ownership, the imported slaves are usually shipped directly off to slave cities, there to reproduce and grow until it's time for them to be eaten. The slave traders need to be sharp, charismatic, and have a strong control over their brain-eating urges. For this reason, it's usually closer to the upper end of the middle class that can fulfill this position.

Governors of slave cities are also significant. They are responsible for keeping the slaves happy enough to continue to live and multiply, but keep them depressed enough to avoid rebellion (or, in rare cases, happy enough to not want to rebel). Furthermore, they recognize that the slaves will eventually be incorporated into their friends and equals, so they attempt to craft them into something more hopeful.

The chefs of the Commune specialize in preparing brains for consumption. Beyond being confectionery masters, they also need to have an aptitude for psychology. By meeting with the future meal beforehand, they have to be able to determine the "flavor" of its brain. Beyond this, they have to be skilled enough at surgery to be able to extract and prepare the brain while causing it minimal harm. Lastly, if for some reason they're handed off a brain that used to belong to a zombie, they must be able to distill the essences of whatever number of minds filled it, and be able to reincorporate those back into other host brains for more moderate consumption. The culinary arts are very important in the Mmorn Commune and the chefs stand among the most respected citizenry.

The harvesters have perhaps the most grim job of all in the Commune. It's their duty to seek out the mad, and extract their brains intact. They are the only zombies permitted to take up arms against their brothers. It's up to them to determine whether or not a particular host will be able to recuperate his losses and function effectively in zombie society, or if he's entirely gone. This is especially trying in borderline cases, in which multiple stable personalities have manifested and none can truly tell if or when one would finally emerge victorious.

The upper echelon of zombies have rarer jobs, and are generally expected to do less service to the Commune. These vocations will range from philosopher to artist to politician to more highly ranked military officers. The unique psychic powers of especially potent zombies allow them to command the troops very efficiently (and, some say, to control the Commune equally well). The philosophers and artists are generally the hungriest of the higher ranked zombies, but they have such strong psyches that they are able to keep their hunger in check with minimal brain consumption. By this point, most of those who do consume brains do so for the experience, or to gain new perspective. They are able to relate to normal sentients easily and will appear to the especially witty, graceful, and insightful. Occasionally zombies of this stature will strike out into the rest of the world, seducing individuals into private areas to consume "fresher" brains than the slaves and battles can provide. Whatever the actual activities that fill such a life are though, the zombies on the upper end of the Commune typically resemble aristocracy more than the peasant's leaders of the ideal Commune.

Populace

As zombies rise in power, they gain access to levels of psychic energy far exceeding normal sentients. While the first brains a zombie eats help to establish his identity, as he consumes more and more it takes a larger number of brains to affect a significant amount of change. The most advanced zombies seem to have hit a plateau beyond which their

powers only increase marginally over long expanses of time. The psychic spillover manifests in a few ways.

Expanded Senses: The zombies' sensory organs become more precise and complex as they advance. Several instances have cropped up in which a zombie's sight has expanded to allow him to see infrared or ultraviolet light, some claiming to see as many as six new colors. The auditory capacity of a zombie's ear can become astoundingly precise -- not only in the degree of sound it can perceive but also in the number of sounds it can digest. It's said that one zombie can tell the number of beans in a bag just by listening to them be poured over a grate. Similar permutations have been recorded for taste, touch, smell, balance, and psychic awareness.

Psychic Blasts: Perhaps the most uncontrolled expression of psi energy, some zombies are able to release their pent up power in a blanket blast of psychic power. The strength of this varies depending on how much psychic energy they store into it, but it has been known to drive weaker people mad on several occasions, literally obliterating their psyches.

Possession: A prized skill of many zombie generals is the ability to mentally dominate other creatures. By sending their consciousness out to take full command of another body the generals become able to orchestrate complex battlefield tactics on the spot. The ethical use of this gift is one of the most contested philosophical point in Mmorn society, but it's difficult to argue against the victories it brings. This skill can be used on multiple creatures at once, and can be used on sentients, but as the victim's psychic proficiency increases, so does the difficulty of the domination.

Politics

Politics are a hot issue among the more learned of the zombies. The state, originally conceived of as communist by Mmorn (and still rhetorically referred to as such by the idealists and the sarcastics) functions on a practical caste system. The only goods that actually completely require distribution are brains, and each individual zombie takes up a station that will bring him enough to suit his necessity. The least developed zombies are the most ravenous, and usually join warbands to sate their hunger. The middle class zombies have developed a more sophisticated pallet, and so take up merchant positions that allow them a steady income of reliable brains, building up specialized jobs in managing slave colonies. The most powerful zombies have less of a need for brains, and so generally devote more of their time to leisure.

There are few laws that are required, as scarcity isn't driving many to desperate actions. Mmorn maintains a small bureaucracy that meets in trial over cases usually dealing with harvesters getting out of line. Certain more conservative elements within the higher society have been pushing to formalize the military and make them pay brain tribute -- feeding a percentage of their spoils back into society, but it remains currently in the minority.

Overall, Mmorn's experiment was a mixed success. The state has become more and more of a burden to him as he suffers the growing tendency toward intrigue within the bureaucracy, and he has gradually been phasing himself out of running things, returning to the necromantic studies into which he once had such keen insight.

Adventure Seeds

Caught!: The most obvious adventure that incorporates the Commune involves the heroes somehow being imported into one of the slave cities. For a conspiratorial twist, you might want to have the governors of that city not be clear as to the intentions, and have the disappearances of fellow slaves shrouded in mystery. If the adventurers get out, they will have to fool the other zombies that they are one of them, and may be able to survive in zombie society a reasonably long time . . . given, of course, that they don't mind eating a few brains for show.

Intrigue!: A mysterious stranger has come into town, and begins hobnobbing with the nobility. A killer is also on the loose, leaving blood splatters but no corpses. Could the two be connected? And why does the stranger's household seem more busy with every slaughter?

War!: An alternate adventure pits the heroes against the Commune directly. The monstrous killings aside, the constant

fear of being turned into one of the fierce undead who assail their lines should provide some interesting roleplay opportunities, and could lead into the adventurers being . . .

Transformed!: Given the possibility that the adventurers lose the battle, they will either be captured and imported as slaves, or they'll be turned into hollow ones themselves. This provides the most open access to the Commune, and would allow the most intimate interaction with its culture. This opens up myriad new adventuring opportunities. It's also possible that only some in the band get transformed, and the others take the newly created undead with them to try and find some magical counter-curse (that could also, perhaps, turn the tide of the war).

Pyramid Review

The Secret of Zir'An Game Screen

Published by Paragon Games

Three-panel b&w screen with Empyriar Code Wheel insert; $5.99

No question, *The Secret of Zir'An RPG* would benefit from a few supplements that disseminate more information about the setting. While *The Secret of Zir'An Game Screen* may not cover much ground from a setting perspective, it's certainly a helpful item that condenses the charts spread throughout the core gamebook into a dandy pill.

First, the physics of the whole thing. It's a three-panel affair, with each panel clocking in at a fairly standard 8.5" × 11". The two side panels fold out from the middle, and the panels lie along their length, making it one of those half-as-high screens that obscure all the die roll fudges you're going to lie about while still allowing you to look your players in the eye as you do it.

The outside deserves only brief mention, since it's mostly decorative with the game's title in the middle (though more on that in a moment). That isn't to say it's not nice -- it's got an almost glossy look to it, the sort of cover that someone paid good money to make feel greasy to the touch when in fact it's just high quality.

Within, your charts. Central to the action, combat (since fights are usually, well . . . central. To the action). The middle bit is the finesse effects you can pull off with various combat skills and weapon types using the Finesse System. Admittedly it's a pretty simple system to recall, so putting these "feats" there is probably the best way to go. The combat formulae themselves are on the leftmost end, summing up how to land a blow. There's a table for how long various combat actions take, how fast you cover ground in a fight, and where you hit.

They follow that with a selection of handicaps from the book. These disadvantages aren't exactly out of place since the ones they list all bear some force on your effectiveness as a combatant. The one somewhat out of place piece on the first panel is the almanac, with the months and days of the year. With all the renaming conventions they use in the book, it might not hurt to have one of these guides handy to better familiarize oneself with those materials. It does hurt, however, not to include the common, standard skill-use formula (the one the core book focuses pointedly on).

A sad bit of layout: The feats in the middle take up just a little too much space, and spill over onto the top of the third panel. It's not awful, but without even a small "continued from previous panel" notation, it takes you a minute to figure out what these three orphaned table lines are doing hanging there. Then like too many screens, they panic and have to fill out some open space. The lists of standardized NPCs are good -- having some quick stats for the people you meet is good, whether you intend to bargain with them or just trade punches. But a random weather chart, compounded by a severe weather sub-table, and barely justified by a weather effects table? How about some more ranged weapon information instead of hiding it under one of the many finesse effects? Players have range prefigured on their character sheet, but a referee who forgoes having that form at hand now has no contingency. The final section is a perfectly appropriate list of common items (walls, trees, doors) and the protection they offer.

And of course, the burning question every time someone releases a GM's shield: What do you include inside? They went with something frugal, extraneous, and interesting . . . an Empyriar Code Wheel. Throughout the core gamebook, illustrations and designs (and even the players' side of this screen) sport the cryptic language of Zir'An. Looking like Mayan hieroglyphics, this two-piece cardboard cutout gets pinned together so you can turn the dial to find the right graphic, and see what the English equivalent is. Not that you can always tell which glyphs are which, but since too much of the core gamebook has these designs obscuring the actual game text, you may as well find out what's being said. Such a choice also probably kept this product's price tag in the single-digits.

The game doesn't use too many charts to begin with, so it's understandable some concessions might be made. ***The Secret of Zir'An Game Screen*** hits most of the important stuff, and it's a tribute to the system's simplicity that it can include as much as it does on three panels. It's inexpensive, and the wheel even manages in its own small way to shed light on Zir'An's secret . . . one of them, anyway.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Award Show

Published by Twilight Creations, Inc.

Designed by Todd A. Breitenstein with Kerry Breitenstein

Illustrated by Aaron Williams

100 full-color cards and b&w rules leaflet; $9.99

After battling zombies, visiting Hell and haunted houses, and dealing with other strange occurrences, the design team at Twilight Creations, Inc. tackle a more mundane subject, though one no less important to the American gaming hobby. *Award Show* claims to simulate the exciting, rewarding world of professional game design. Well, not quite . . . because as the title suggests, *Award Show* concentrates on the one night when you can gain peer recognition for your creation and win a statue as the proof.

The game consists of 100 attractively illustrated cards that each depicts a busy monkey, either counting or rigging the vote, or in ceremony best ready to accept an award. The cards come in several varieties. They start out with the six Company cards, each parodying an American publisher right down to the logo, such as A-Man Games, Paradise Studios, Inc., and Twilight Recreations, Inc. The 36 Company Award category cards are divided into six awards: Best Game, Best Game Art, Best Game Fiction, Best Graphic Design, Best Rules, and Fan's Choice. The six cards in each category correspond to the six Company Cards. The remainder and bulk of the cards are a mix of Vote cards numbered from -2 to +2, and Event cards, while the last card is the Ceremony Host, or rather Dealer card.

Designed for two to six players, they really take the roles of designers, artists, and writers of gaming materials rather any one publisher, as the publisher they represent changes from one round to the next. A Voting Round begins with the six cards in an Award Category being laid out on the table, each player receiving a Company card that is kept hidden, and a hand of eight Vote and Event cards. Then players take it in turn to place a Vote card face down next to one of the Company Award cards or play an Event card. A player's aim is to get as many positively valued Vote cards onto the Company Award that matches the Company card he is holding secret, and as many negatively valued Vote cards onto any other Company receiving votes.

Play continues until every player has run out of cards to vote with, or decides to pass. Then Award Presentation begins with the vote counting, the dealer deciding which stack of Vote cards to count. The process continues until every Vote card has been tallied, or until a total of eight positive votes have been counted for the Award Category. Once done, Company Cards are revealed and if one matches the highest number of votes received, its player wins the award and he receives all of the Company Award cards in the category that received any votes.

The only difference to this play is the Event cards, used during both phases of the game. Some allow a player to play a card out of turn or swap Company cards with another player during Voting. While in the Award Presentation phase, others can negate a Vote or prevent the next player from being the Dealer, and thus stop him controlling the order in which the Vote cards are counted. Essentially, Event cards are interrupts to normal play.

A new round begins with a new Award Category, and players receiving new Company and Vote cards. Once all six round have been played, the player with the most Company Award cards wins the game.

Playing Award Show is an under-whelming experience. It certainly looks good, and certainly proves that Aaron Williams should be drawing more monkeys. But the play is uninteresting, lacking both the substance and the bite

befitting the subject. Nor is helped by an underwritten set of rules that adds neither flavor nor feeling to the game. And because the whole game is essentially played blind, there is no reason for player interaction or the kind of table talk that might have added the missing element -- fun. On the plus side, Award Show does prove that an American publisher can properly package its small card games, but nevertheless this is disappointing. If all award shows are as uninteresting as *Award Show,* then my tuxedo remains unpurchased on the high street.

--Matthew Pook

Big Eyes, Archaic Smile: Reality Thaumata

"I have gazed on the walls of impregnable Babylon, along which chariots may race, and on the Zeus by the banks of the Alphaeus. I have seen the Hanging Gardens and the Colossus of Helios, the great man-made mountains of the lofty pyramids, and the gigantic tomb of Mausolus. But when I saw the sacred house of Artemis that towers to the clouds, the others were placed in the shade, for the sun himself has never looked upon its equal outside Olympus."
-- attributed to Antipater of Sidon (ca. 180 B.C.)

Sing, O Muse, of the four colors splashed across the world in the wake of the Divine Alexander! Sing of the cyan screens of the mausolikons! Sing of the magenta sails of the aetheremes! Sing of the yellow-bronze armor of the kolossi! Sing of the black dreams of kings and wonder-makers, who hold the key to power over all the world! Sing of Reality Thaumata, the world of wonders!

Like [Reality Futura](), which we visited some years back, this world also takes its shape from an artistic sensibility, which drives technology and history alike. This is the syncretic, utopian, sensual world of the Hellenistic Age, the age when the Seven Wonders -- both *thaumata,* or "magics," and *themata,* "marvels" -- of the World were completed and compiled. (All seven Wonders only co-existed for about 50 years, from the completion of the Lighthouse at Pharos, in 282 B.C., to the destruction of the Colossus of Rhodes in the earthquake of 226 B.C.) During the centuries after Alexander the Great's death, poets refashioned the old myths into new poetics. Apollonios of Rhodes assembled a league of extraordinary Argonauts in the last Greek epic, and artists painted the gods as beautiful yet fallible figures both sublime and earthy. In Reality Thaumata, the mood is one of high contrast and hyperkinetic action, erotic love and epic hubris. It's Yoshiyuki Tomino vs. David Drake in an anime-antique mashup for all the marbles!

"One praises another great structure built by a king of Egypt, namely the tower which stands on Pharos, the island commanding the harbor of Alexandria . . . We should not omit the great spirit shown by King Ptolemy, whereby he allowed the architect's name, Sostratus of Cnidus, to be inscribed on the creation. It helps when ships are moving at night . . . The continuous burning of the beacon is dangerous because it might be mistaken for a star, its appearance from far off being similar."
-- Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* (77 A.D.)

Under the brilliant, indolent rule of Ptolemy II, Neo-Aegypt crouches like the Sphinx, predatory and mysterious. The thauma of the Pyramids, harnessed by the geometer Euklides, flows through whirring insectile automata and eerily glowing pharoi all along the Nile. The Great Pharos stands ready, its fiery red beam lashing out thousands of stadia to destroy attacking fleets or burning straight up to drive the harmastres, the star-chariots that travel beyond the Moon. Ptolemy revels in luxury, plied with the finest wines by his harem of Bast-priestesses, but his lust for power is greater than any fleshly urge. Millions of fellahin sweat in the fields and factories of Neo-Aegypt, tracked by the ceaseless musings of the Great Bibliokephalon in Alexandria, a living library, a thaumatic brain tended by the greatest artificers in the world. Ptolemy's navy is the largest in the world as well, anchored by the battleship *Iamatos* constructed by Pyrgoteles. Its crew of 4,000 and marine complement of 2,800 is larger than some cities' whole navy; the *Iamatos* holds Crete and Cyprus and the southern coast of Anatolia in its grasp. The rest of the Neo-Aegyptian fleet presses Ptolemy's war with Antigonos II of Macedon deep into the Aegean. Only the Tower of the Winds, built in Athens by Andronikos of Kyrrhestos, keeps the Macedonian fleet alive.

"In the first place, the upper earth, when looked at from above, is . . . of divers colors, of which the colors which painters use on earth are only a sample. . . . And in this fair region everything that grows -- trees, and flowers, and fruits -- is in a like degree fairer than any here; and there are hills, and stones in them . . . And upon the upper earth are animals and men . . . dwelling about the air as we dwell about the sea; others in islands which the air flows round, near the continent: and in a word, the air is used by them as the water and the sea are by us, and the ether is to them what the air is to us."
-- Plato, *Phaidon* (360 B.C.)

But if Neo-Aegypt rules the waves, the Seleukids of the East command the skies. Antiochos II reigns from a moving castle in the sky, planted with mighty trees and flowers from the upper earth. These Hanging Gardens hover over

Babylon, and grow the liftwood to build Antiochos' aetheremes, the ships of the sky. With them, he presses his claims to the uttermost east and the northern wastes beyond Parthia. Here, his trained monster ranchers, recruited as youths from the farms and towns of his empire, harness griffins and other wondrous beasts, raising them from hatchlings warmed in the pockets of the ranchers' Parthian-style trousers. They train them to fight, pitting their beasts against each other in intricate combats. Full grown and well blooded, these flying predators carry Seleukid cavalry in waves against the armies of Neo-Aegypt in Coele-Syria and Palestine. Antiochos' writ runs from the Indus to the Aegean, although the people of Antioch and Sardis whisper that their emperor grows distant and inhuman from a diet of upper earth fruits and perfumes.

"[T]hey were prevented from making fast to the shore by Talos, a bronze giant, who broke off lumps of rock from the cliff to hurl at them. . . . His body and his limbs were brazen and invulnerable, except at one point . . . He terrified the Argonauts, and exhausted though they were they hastily backed water."
-- Apollonios of Rhodes, *Argonautika* (ca. 240 B.C.)

Only a few cities and islands on the Anatolian coast remain free of both Seleukid and Ptolemaic designs. Pergamum, in the north, has its own Bibliokephalon. Ouranopolis, the city of the Sky-Men founded on Mount Athos by Alexarchus in 300 B.C., has its strange overlords and their mystical disciplines to keep it hidden and safe. The rebel slave Drimakos holds out against the Seleukids on Chios with sheer daring, robbing from the rich and giving to the poor. Halicarnassus has its Mausoleum, covered with intricate carvings and paintings that seem virtually real, that move between the Otherworld and ours along a matrix designed by the four finest sculptors in all the Hellenic world. They carry knowledge and information from that world to this, and a bright blue mirror thaumatically ground from silica sand and silver-arsenic can reflect them no matter where it goes. These mausolikons are found in scholars' chambers and artisans' lodges, and carry messages between separated lovers who may never meet in the flesh.

These cities, and a handful of others, are protected by the merchant republic of Rhodes, the last free democracy in the world. Rhodes is defended by its kolossi, bronze giants piloted by the bravest of the brave. They walk, swim, leap, and fly everywhere that tyranny threatens or injustice is done to a free citizen. Of course, there are some bad seeds in every crop -- a number of kolossi pilots have long-lost brothers or romantic rivals who steal kolossi (or hire eccentric mechanics to build them) and turn to evil and piracy. The Great Kolossos, built by Chares to defeat a Macedonian siege fifty years ago, still stands astride the harbor, its eyes glowing with Archimedean puissance. Archimedes' city Syracuse, although ruled by the tyrant Hieron, is an ally of Rhodes against the cupidity of Macedon and Neo-Aegypt. Hieron pays Archimedes well and sponsors even his maddest researches.

"So having prepared a mass of all kinds of material, he constructed a machine called the City-Killer, which in size exceeded by far those that were before."
-- Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* (ca. 35 B.C.)

These researches pay off in the form of mighty war machines from the Solar Mirror that defends Syracuse harbor to catapults that can fling iron spheres across seas to the City-Killer of Demetrios, which was lost after the siege of Rhodes and lurks in rumor in every unexplored corner of the world from the frozen Sarmatian plains to the fire-baked mountains of Ethiopia. Eccentric wonder-makers hole up in isolated caves or remote islands, preparing unknown dangers for the world. Occasionally they emerge and seize power somewhere, either behind a semi-barbarian kinglet in Pontus or Galatia, or in their own name as tyrants. Philo of Byzantium, who while at Alexandria harnessed the deadly "negative matter" known as the vacuum (contained in brass casks, it keeps Ptolemy's aetheremes aloft in lieu of liftwood), now rules his home city with madness and mechanisms, protected from seaborne invaders by his mighty Clashing Rocks. Roving gangs of youths race autoharmae, self-propelled chariots, in the Hippodrome and down the Mese while Philo perfects further unguessable devices.

"When the statue was completely finished, Phidias prayed to Zeus to show by a sign whether the work was to his liking. Immediately, so the story goes, a thunderbolt fell on the spot where to this day a bronze jar stands to cover the place."
-- Pausanias, *Description of Greece* (ca. 150 A.D.)

The Spartans, under King Agis IV, have retreated into a mythical past of warrior glory that now encompasses the entire

southern half of the Peloponnese. Here, the disciplined and ascetic spartiates can live simply and elegantly as their ancient forebears did, practicing their martial arts and bullying helots, though those who have offended their lords must wander the world and the waves seeking a living by the sword. Just north of Sparta is Arcadia, a pastoral country where the Olympic precinct and the living statue of Zeus remain inviolate on the banks of the sacred river Alph. Here, poets and singers seek inspiration, and those young Hellenes who would learn to harness unusual divine powers attend strict academies in starched uniform togas.

"To thee, Artemis, the Amazons, whose mind is set on war, in Ephesus beside the sea established an image beneath an oak trunk, and Hippolyta performed a holy rite for thee, and they themselves, O Artemis, around the image danced a war-dance -- first in shields and armor, and again in a circle arraying a spacious choir. . . . And afterwards around that image was raised a shrine of broad foundations. The sun shall behold nothing more divine, nothing richer."
-- Callimachus, Hymn to Artemis of Ephesus (ca. 260 B.C.)

Of course, some promising female sorceresses and wonder-workers seek sanctuary with the Amazons in the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus. Guarded not only by the Amazon warriors but by harpies, striges, sirens, and naiads, the matriarchy of Ephesus is the only city besides Rhodes that can hold its own against the great empires. The Ephesians are allied with the even more gynolatrous island of Lemnos, where only women dwell. Perforce, the Lemnians and their Ephesian allies must become experts at parthogenesis, the creation of life. Ephesian chimerae are developed -- designed, much like mechanical wonders in other cities -- and bred in the precincts of the temple, which holds a menagerie of uncanny beasts equaled only by the vast zoos of Antiochos, who can draw from all of Asia and the Upper Earth. (Some say the streams of [giant monsters](#) that attack the Pharos come from Ephesus, also.) Indeed, the Amazons of Ephesus can create life in anything from the walls of their temple to the clouds above their city. Many Ephesians are attended by small glowing balls of slime or flame, capable of speech and thought, which serve as pet and companion, watchdog and servant.

"Aristarchos of Samos produced a book based on certain hypotheses, in which it follows from the premises that the universe is many times greater than the universe now so called."
-- Archimedes, *The Sand-Reckoner* (ca. 225 B.C.)

For the curious connoisseur of **GURPS Infinite Worlds,** Reality Thaumata is a Quantum 3 world, possibly accessible from the Chronobahn somewhere in the deserts of Neo-Aegypt. (Because what's an anime setting without a potential Nazi invasion?) Potential triggers for this world's high "artistic charge" might include that thunderbolt in Olympia (a reality quake rolling back to 432 B.C.?), a spell cast by Medea over the Golden Fleece, or the whim of Ptah-Hephaistos. It hardly matters to the sleek, androgynous kolossi pilots or the magical Ephesian girls who live in it -- they just have to live fast, love well, and leave a good-looking mosaic.

Dork Tower!

Pyramid Review

Rocketmen: Axis of Evil

Published by WizKids, Inc.

Designed by Jordan Weisman, Jon Leitheusser, & Shane Small

Illustrated by Vic Bonilla, Sandra Garavito, Kim Goddard, Shane Hartley, Kian Chai Ng, Ethan Pasternack, Shane Small, Dustin Tucker, & Kelsey Wagner

Rocketmen: Axis of Evil Cartoon DVD with Two Pre-set Ship Cards, Microid Resource Card, Crew Resource Card, Asteroid Card, 2½'' × 3½'' b&w 16-Page Rulebook, & One Six-Sided Die; $12.99
Rocketmen: Axis of Evil Game Pack Containing Two Ship Cards, Microid Resource Card, Crew Resource Card, Asteroid Card, 2½'' times; 3½'' b&w 16-Page Rulebook, & One Six-Sided Die; $3.99

Genres come and go, sometimes in waves as multiple publishers jump aboard the latest trend. In 2001 it was World War II, and in 2003 it was pirates. Currently we seem to be between phases, and the only piratical survivor is WizKids' *Pirates of the Spanish Main.* This was the first CSG (or Constructible Strategy Game). Themed around the Golden Age of Sail with English and Spanish ships engaging with each other and pirates for the gold ashore the islands of the Caribbean, the constructible element were the ships themselves. Packaged as a pair of plastic styrene cards, the pieces snapped together as frigates, galleons and other ships, as well as forts in later expansion.

Matched with simple game play, *Pirates of the Spanish Main* managed to bridge the gap between collectible card game and the miniatures game, retaining the best features of both. Now WizKids have done it again, essentially mapping the rules, play, and design onto an all-new genre. *Rocketmen: Axis of Evil* is pulp science fiction, inspired by the feel and look of the cliff-hanger serials *Buck Rogers* and *Flash Gordon,* a sub-genre barely touched upon by the hobby.

The setting for *Rocketmen: Axis of Evil* is a future of the past in which the Legion of Terra under Lord Invictus has arisen to form an Axis of Evil with King Krillra of Mars. Arrayed against their plans to conquer the Solar System is the Alliance of Free Planets -- Mercury and Venus along with Earth's Rebels. These four factions vie for control of resource rich Asteroid Belt, and form the focus for both the game's DVD and the five-issue comic strip randomly inserted into the Game Packs. Future expansions will expand the background and add vessels for the outer worlds of Saturn, Ganymede, Io, and Neptune.

Each Game Pack contains a small but easy-to-understand rulebook, a tiny six-sided die, a full color one-page comic strip with faction information and ship listings on the reverse, plus six plastic styrene cards. These contain the pieces for either two ships or one ship and a squadron of fighters, a crew card, and a resource card. Each ship or squadron also comes with a data card. Both ships and fighters require construction, not always an easy task, but the results are bright, colorful vessels, though perhaps more fragile than the ships of *Pirates of the Spanish Main.*

Once put together, the spaceships come in four types, each with a special ability. Fighters have Evasive Maneuvers and can dodge attacks; Rocketships, the mainstay of each faction's fleet, have Extended Range and can increase their

attack range at the cost of accuracy; Cruisers have Armored Hulls; and Space Stations have Base Defense, making them difficult to damage. All have the equivalent of two, three, or four hard points, onto which slot the Pods from the resource card, either Arc Lasers or Shields.

Each has several values, all marked on its data card. This gives the ship's name, collector's number, faction affiliation, and point cost as well as its special ability and background information. More pertinent to the game are its AP or Atomic Engine Power Points, Weapon Rating or WR, cargo capacity, and both Movement and Weapon Increments. These last two are marked along the bottom long edge of the data card, and can be short, medium, or long range.

Optionally, crew can be added to the ship, each crew token slipped into one of the slots on a ship's base. The cheaper, generic crews, of which there are four per card, enable easier maneuvering, weapons targeting, boarding of enemy vessels, mining, or ship repair, while the personalities give better and multiple abilities. Crews are worth having, for they add and improve a player's options during play. For example, the Venusian Navigator allows a ship to rotate free of cost, making it more maneuverable.

At the game's heart is a battle for resources, which come in three types: Carbon-7, Newtonium, and Titanium. These come in the same resource card as the ship pods, and are scattered across the play area before the game's start on the central Rogue Asteroid or as free-floating Microids. Mined and returned in a ship's cargo hold, the resources can be expended to bring ships from a player's reserve fleet into active play.

Besides scattering resources, set-up involves the purchase of ships and crews for each player's active and reserve fleets. Once done, game play consists of players moving and attacking with all of their vessels, using AP to do both. Ship maneuvers include Move (in a straight line equal to its Movement Increment), Rotate (to face a new direction), Avoid (essentially fly around a large obstacle), and Dock. The latter enables a ship to latch onto an asteroid or microid to mine it, to unload cargo at its home base, or to conduct a boarding action. This is the game's most complex set of mechanics and involves lots of dice. After a successful boarding action, a captured ship can either be destroyed or towed back to home base and salvaged to give further resources.

Attacking also requires the expenditure of AP, one per Laser Arc fired. This can be in any direction and from one ship's base to another. To attack, two dice are rolled, and if the result equals, or is higher than the attacker's WR, it succeeds. The target's Shield Pods make it more difficult to hit and each successful hit destroys one of the target's pods. It is also possible to kill the crew aboard an unshielded ship, and when the ship has no pods left, any hit destroys it. Ships can also be damaged in collisions, and a canny player can bump and grind an unshielded ship with his shielded one! Play continues until one side is defeated or his asteroid base (or Space Station) is captured.

A few questions arose during play. For example, could a Tractor Beam Engineer use the tractor beam offensively, to pull or push a ship? And can crew be carried in the cargo hold for use in boarding actions or as prisoners? Could you transfer crew from one ship to another? With no FAQ available, our house rules answered these with a no (but we would like to), a no, and a yes. We also wanted a greater selection of weapons, such as missiles, grappling hooks, and more varied beam weapons, as well as an independent raider faction, so that you could have a faction of pirates that nobody liked.

With just the two coalitions available, *Rocketmen: Axis of Evil* is currently a two-player game, though more players could divide forces. Two Game Packs each are enough to gain a taste of the game, but many more are needed to freely build each player's active and reserve fleets -- I got a decent mix with eight. While the ships are highly attractive, many are quite fragile, and fiddling around with the crew tokens will neither ease this, nor speed set-up time. But play is quick and easy, with your ships soon zipping through the asteroid belt to strike at your opponent and mine the resources necessary to activate ships in the reserve fleet. The comic strip and each data card's descriptive text both provide the background to play against, while the crew tokens add character. And it is the use of these tokens that make up the game's customizable element, the enhancements they provide being too good to ignore, and are often vital to a ship's survival and effectiveness. Beyond the choice of crew tokens, the game offers little in the way of tactical subtlety, except perhaps keeping your ships together in squadrons, and using the large asteroids as occasional cover.

What really grabs you about *Rocketmen: Axis of Evil* is the ships, which just scream pulp sci-fi goodness. The background is also nicely done, and the more ships that you have, the easier it will be to design scenarios to fitting the

setting beyond the simple blast 'em up and resource raids. The simple mechanics, handled on two dice with simple modifiers, would also lend themselves to an easy RPG engine, and a ***Rocketmen: Axis of Evil RPG*** would be a terrific idea, not only filling an empty niche on the gaming shelves but also developing the setting. Yet that suggestion aside, ***Rocketmen: Axis of Evil*** is a clever adaptation of WizKids' CSG model to another genre, and the result is actually quite fun to collect because the ships are so damned cool. Even better, ***Rocketmen: Axis of Evil*** is just plain fun to play.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Dungeons & Dragons: The Dragon Compendium, Volume 1 (for Dungeons & Dragons)

Published by Paizo Publishing

Edited by Erik Mona

Developed by Mike McArtor

256-page full-color hardcover; $39.95

Dragon Magazine has served as a source of new classes, rules, magic items and ideas for over three decades and multiple versions of *Dungeons & Dragons.* The *Dragon Compendium* is the beginning of Paizo Publishing's effort to mine this vast storehouse of information for today's players and Dungeon Masters. Paizo plans to issue a series of these volumes, with future ones possibly themed around specific settings or elements. Paizo clearly wanted to put their best foot forward with this first compilation. The list of authors whose articles were drawn on for this compilation reads like a who's who of *Dungeons & Dragons* history and RPG design, including Gary Gygax (co-creator of *Dungeons & Dragons*), Ed Greenwood (creator of the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*), Monte Cook, and Skip Williams (both co-creators of *Dungeons & Dragons* *Third Edition*).

The first articles presented are the staples of *d20 System* supplements: new races, classes, prestige classes, and feats. The races presented are unique and interesting, without being too overpowered, although the Dvati, a race of identical twins both played by one character, will need some work by the DM to make sure they are not too unbalancing. The base classes offered are an eclectic selection, but may not fit perfectly into every campaign. The Jester would enliven a traditional medieval European milieu, but could be out of place in a world based on other eras and cultures. The Death Master, a servant of Orcus with divine and arcane powers may be better suited as an NPC class, unless an "evil" campaign is being run.

The prestige classes are similar in their variety and potential utility. The Arcanopath Monk is an anti-mage mystic warrior. His attacks and abilities do both physical damage as well as reflecting spells, stunning mages or even cause them to forget their spells, possibly permanent. There are both random feats as well as themed groups of feats. The themed groups include bloodlines, which give powers based on the characters ancestors (draconic bloodline, for example). Most of these grant extra spell powers, thereby favoring sorcerers, but could have a broader application. The other prevalent theme is martial arts, which are strongly represented.

The equipment section starts with weapons, mundane and magical. The mundane weapons selection is a good cross-section of weapons from different historical periods, such as the pilum, bardiche, and lochaber axe. Several pages are dedicated to Alchemical items, non-magical items with magical-equivalent effects. These are especially useful as a way to allow parties to have access to low-level magic benefits without putting too much magic in the campaign. The magic item selection is well-balanced between combat and utility items and most DMs should be able to find something useful.

The "Classics" section is a mix of articles which expand and supplement the basic game concepts. Spell Templates are an alternative to metamagic feats, similar in concept to monster templates such as the vampiric template, which modify various aspects of spells to create new types of spells with common themes or related effects which give spellcasters a tool for further customizing and personalizing their magic. These templates are a creation of designer Monte Cook's and a feature of many of his Malhavoc Press products such as Arcana Evolved. Their presence in the

Dragon Compendium is a good example of the potential of the OGL system to allow for the sharing of ideas. Other items include an expansion of the glyph spells and the theory and creation of tesseracts as terrain features. The piece on riddles is especially useful as it goes beyond a simple list, with ideas on how to use riddles in the adventure and campaign.

The monster section contains as many monster templates as it does actual monsters which is not necessarily a failing. While using templates does entail more work, it gives new life to existing creatures, in essence giving each one a number of variants which can be used in all sorts of situations. The magazine's namesake is also represented with the Orange, Purple, and Yellow Dragons, all of which will be an (un)pleasant surprise for players used to the traditional wyrms. An especially amusing twist on an old favorite is the Fire Troll, infused with the traditional bane of troll-kin.

The appendices are a potpourri of campaign and adventure ideas. Some of the more unusual items include a pronunciation guide for many game terms (always important for the purist), plus a guide to the chi square test and its game utility. Hearkening back to the first edition of the ***Dungeon Master's Guide*** is the solo dungeon generator which is useful for new players and players who find themselves without a group. Wrapping the book up is a cover gallery.

Compilations of this sort are hard to judge. On one hand, the ***Dragon Compendium*** does what it was intended to do, which is provide a selection of the best material published in *Dragon Magazine.* The chosen articles are of high quality, well written and accompanied by excellent art and good overall production values. Older material is converted to the latest rule set with minimal damage to the spirit of the original. The articles chosen are diverse in terms of the aspects of the game they enhance, power levels, and the age range of the magazine issues selected. And like the magazine it draws from, this book is a very good source of concentrated inspiration. While the specifics of a given piece may not be exactly what one needs, they can generate new ideas that will be useful for players and Dungeon Masters alike.

The problem is that the utility of any given piece -- and how much work it will take to integrate into an existing campaign -- will be different for each person; in other words, your mileage may vary. Some of the ideas presented may seem unbalanced, ill-conceived, or just odd, because we are unable to see them in the context of the campaign or game experience that inspired them. An example of this is the Sha'ir class. From the article one might simply see a variant magic user with a powerful familiar, improved spell flexibility, and some affinity towards geniekind. It is only by being familiar with the ***al-Qadim*** for ***Dungeons & Dragons*** *Second Edition* does one understand the Sha'ir as an individual spellcaster with a unique social role of interlocutor with the geniekind who are a powerful, almost essential force in the land. Without having this insight into the intent of the author, it is possible we will miss the full potential of the ideas presented in a given article.

This book is probably not a critical addition to your ***Dungeons & Dragons*** collection if you have already have a large *Dragon* collection or possess the out-of-print CD collection containing the first 250 issues. But if you are someone who is always hunting for new ideas, content, or new mechanics, then the ***Dragon Compendium, Volume 1*** may be an excellent choice for you. However it is strongly recommended that you browse through it, if at all possible. At $39.95, it is not inexpensive, and you will want to make sure that you will be able to get enough out of it to make it worthwhile.

--Michael Breen

The Gentleman Privateer

The Rough Trade Of Legitimate Piracy
for *GURPS*

by Nicholas Lovell

1561 A.D.

In the pre-dawn light, the war galley crept across the purple waters of the Aegean, the only evidence of its passage the ripples where forty blades broke the surface.

Frater Romegas stood on the prow. He strained his senses towards the warship anchored in the lee of the high-cliffed promontory. Six lengths to go, and no sound of alarm.

Behind Romegas, 60 fighting men stood in readiness. Fifteen knights in mail shirts, red crosses prominent on white tabards. Men-at-arms with crossbows and pikes.

A breath of wind stirred, carrying the creaks and groans of a ship riding at anchor. Four lengths.

The silence was shattered by the clatter of a pike across the deck. Romegas did not look round. "Now."

The drum spoke, and the slaves responded. Three lengths, two, one.

Romegas leapt forward as the vessels met with a crash. "Onward, my brethren! Onward, Knights of St John," he roared.

Battle was joined.

1804 A.D.

*"Prize crew away, hands to braces!" Captain Don Antonio Juan de Amaza gauged wind and tide. Call it skill or judgement, dawn had found the privateer **El Orely y Los Tres** in the heart of a British merchant fleet. It had captured two prizes already. The inshore squadron of the Royal Navy was over 10 miles away, and would take an hour to beat into range.*

Captain Don de Amaza assessed the remaining ships. Three were out of range, handy vessels with practised crews. A two-masted merchantman, barely a thousand yards away, was as good as captured, and the single-masted sloop was a potential.

"Prepare the long nines, aim for the masts," he called.

Tonight, four captured British ships would be at anchor in Cadiz. A good day's work.

> ### 3478 Exarch Calendar
>
> *Warden Niclo Crroe smiled. "Engage grapplions, ahead one quarter." The humming vibration of the sublight engine shifted down two tones as the **Endymion** slowed. On the viewscreen, a crippled freighter rotated about its central axis, fuel venting from the port engine in a cloud of superheated vapor. A micro-jump, barely four-tenths of a second long, had brought the **Endymion** to firing range. It took eight seconds to bring the **Endymion's** shields to operational status after a jump, and a well-prepared opponent could make short work of the privateer in that time. The calculated risk had borne fruit. This freighter had been ill-prepared for trouble.*
>
> *A siren sounded. "Viper interceptors launching, Your Excellence. ETA 17 minutes."*
>
> *"Understood." Seventeen minutes to grapple and board the freighter and then carry her through four pre-programmed jumps to safety. Crroe resisted the urge to rub his hands together. The annual trading venture of the harem of Aambula was in his hands. He brought honor to the kin of Crroe.*

* * *

For centuries, the landed aristocracy have wrestled with the challenge of what to do with their youngest sons. Large families brought prestige, and in an age of high infant mortality and low life expectancy, the surest way of ensuring that the wealth and estates stayed within a family was to have children. Lots of children.

The strategy succeeded if at least one of the male children survived to adulthood and inherited the estates, the wealth and the title. But success created its own new problems: the younger sons would be aristocrats, but without land or wealth. Families needed to find something for them to do. The Church was a popular route, since it offered power and influence. Joining the army or the navy was a route to glory, if not riches.

But many young aristocrats sought adventure, glory, fame, and riches. The life of the noble privateer offered all of this, and more.

The distinction between privateer and pirate was fine, but very important. Pirates were individuals working on their own initiative for their own gain; privateers were a recognised tool of war and had legitimacy with at least one nation.

The role of a privateer was to act as an extension of the official navy, with a focus on commerce-raiding. By granting individual captains the legal right to attack its enemies, the state was able to create a ready-made armed naval force at little or no cost. The state had no capital outlay, since the privateer's vessel was purchased, outfitted, and manned at his own expense, and the state could easily profit from the venture as between 25 and 75% of the value of the vessels, cargo, and ransoms captured or earned on the voyage were due as taxes. Different forms of legal rights existed. Examples include:

- **Papal patronage:** By the 16th century, the Knights Hospitaller -- founded during the Crusades -- had transformed themselves into the finest seaman and commerce raiders in the world, attacking Muslim shipping from their maritime headquarters on Rhodes, and later Malta, with the support and patronage of the Pope.
- **Letters of Marque:** A Letter of Marque and Reprisal empowered a privateer to make war on enemy shipping. The document gave the privateer legal protection from all warships of his own nation provided that he obeyed the terms of his Letter. This usually involved only attacking ships of a specified enemy nation, with stiff penalties for raiding vessels that were neutral or belonging to his own nation.
- **Exploring/colonisation:** While not a direct legal form, if there was no established diplomatic channel, there was little to prevent a privateer from taking goods, gold, and even slaves from newly discovered lands.

The advantages to the privateer were equally clear cut. At least one nation would provide him with safe harbors where he could re-supply and refit. He could gain significant riches legally, and if highly successful he could expect to be feted at court, rewarded for his success and potentially become a landowner or powerful noble in his own right.

A Privateer Without A Ship Is Just A Dreamer

A privateer's ship was very different from a naval vessel. A privateer was in the game for profit, with glory a distant second. A naval battle in which the enemy was sunk at great cost to the winner -- say, a butcher's bill of 50% dead or wounded -- might be glorious, but it would be disastrous for a privateer. Chasing down unarmed merchantmen, raiding a fishing port to cut out the cargo vessel that had taken refuge there, or encouraging ships to surrender . . . *these* were the preferred tactics of the privateer.

A privateer ship needed to be fast, well-armed and with a large crew.

Wherever possible, a fight would be won by an overwhelming display of force -- all guns run out, superior maneuvering, heavily armed boarders manning the rigging -- and without a single shot being fired. The ship also needed to be easy to maintain and repair, as privateers often operated a long way from secure harbors or sources of supply.

The vessel could come from many sources, depending on the character and the nature of the campaign. Likely routes might be:

- **Patron:** A guild, monarch, aristocrat, or wealthy collection of merchants. Typically, the benefit of the vessel would be offset by a duty: hunt ships belonging to an enemy nation, protect all vessels belonging to the guild, or something similar. It also might not belong to the privateer, but to his patron and the loss of the ship could be a source of disgrace, humiliation, a court martial and possibly even result in execution.
- **Borrowing:** A privateer could borrow the money to start his career. He would have a corresponding debt, and the lender would not be happy if his vessel was sunk or captured.
- **Signature gear:** This should require a good background story. For example: A player might create the *Pride of Spain,* which was stolen by an imprisoned English aristocrat during his escape from the fortified harbor of Cadiz. Now every Spanish warship is seeking the *Pride of Spain,* to gain honor and fame by capturing or sinking the symbol of Spain's humiliation.
- **Starting wealth:** The PC may be rich, but a significant amount of the wealth should be tied up in the vessel.

Costs can vary. A good rule of thumb is that a privateer ship would cost approximately ten times the starting wealth of the Tech Level of the campaign.

Characteristics

A gentleman privateer is a study in contrasts. Of privileged upbringing, he is viewed by many as nothing but a common pirate. A seeker of adventure, he must be able to fight, sail, and barter, but he must have the social graces required to secure his letter of marque and get the highest ransoms for his captives.

A gentleman privateer was rarely cruel. Although their victims viewed them as pirates, there was little of the wanton cruelty for which pirates were renowned. Ordinary seaman and passengers were often set free, perhaps in an open boat or on the nearest bit of deserted land. Wealthy captives or aristocrats were kept until a ransom could be paid, often as a guest of the privateer rather than a prisoner. Gentleman privateers sought to be cultured and refined, and worked hard to differentiate themselves from the rough-and-ready pirates that many assumed them to be.

The status and reputation of a noble privateer was varied. Although he was typically an aristocrat (Status 2), even his own countrymen would look down on him (Reputation -1, everyone except a large class). Among the enemies against which he fought his reputation was barely better than that of a common pirate (Reputation -4, among citizens of the

opposing state or nation, a large group of people).

The legal protections gave the privateer a patron of sorts. Ships of the same flag, whether other privateers or naval vessels, might come to the privateer's assistance. If the assistance was provided by another privateer, it was likely to be for monetary advantage, and could be extortionately expensive. Naval vessels would intercede since their duty was to sink enemy shipping -- they helped because it would be a dereliction of duty not to fight the enemy, not because they wished to help the privateer. (Patron, 6 or less). In return, a privateer had a duty to harass merchant shipping and disrupt the sea lanes. (Duty, 9 or less). It was not an extremely hazardous duty, since the privateer could pick the nature of the targets, but if a privateer consistently failed to capture anything (or was foolish or greedy enough to target vessels of his own nationality) the legal status could be withdrawn and, in the latter case, the privateer could find himself declared a pirate even by his own nation. Two of the most famous English privateers, Henry Morgan and William Kidd, were both eventually tried on charges of piracy by the English Crown, and Kidd was found guilty and hanged in 1701.

A privateer would also have many enemies. The navy of an entire nation, or possibly several, would be set against him, and it would be a feather in the cap of any ambitious captain to capture or sink a well-known privateer. Although privateer vessels were typically fast and well-armed, they could not hope to stand up to a well-equipped and manned naval frigate. (Enemy, utterly formidable group, 9 or less).

Skills

A noble privateer is a seaman/spacer, a fighter, and a courtier, all at once. His primary skills are focused on commanding a ship (Crewman, Navigation, Leadership, and Shiphandling) and fighting (Guns (Pistol or Rifle) and a melee weapon). Secondary skills add extra depth to his capabilities (Area Knowledge, perhaps of safe smugglers' havens or routes less well travelled by naval vessels, Astronomy and its pre-requisite Mathematics, Cartography and Gunner skill for using the ship-mounted weapons). Background skills are derived from his noble upbringing (Connoisseur, Savoir Faire).

Character Template

Gentleman Privateer   *120 points*

You are a nobleman with a licence to hunt down and capture enemy shipping for profit. A gentleman throughout, you walk the perilous course between legitimate warfare and the capital offence of piracy.

Attributes: **ST** 11 [10]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 11 [10]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24; HP 11 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Languages: Native language [0]; additional language (accented) [4].

Advantages: Status 2 [10]; Patron 4 (extremely powerful organisation/small nation; 6 or less) [13].

Disadvantages: Duty (raid enemy commerce; 9 or less) [-5]; Enemy (utterly formidable group; 6 or less) [-20]; Reputation -1 (Disdain by fellow countrymen for privateers, every one except a large class, all the time) [-4]; Reputation -4 (Viewed as pirate by enemies, large class, all the time) [-10]

Primary skills: Crewman (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Pistol or Rifle both (E) DX+1 [2]-13; Leadership (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Broadsword, Rapier or Sabre all (A) DX+1 [4]-13; Navigation (A) IQ+0 [2]-12; Shiphandling (H) IQ+1 [8]-13;

Secondary skills: Area Knowledge (Ports) (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Astronomy (H) IQ-1 [2]-11; Cartography (A) IQ+0 [2]-

12; Gunner (E) DX+0 [1]-12; Mathematics (Applied) (H) IQ-2 [1]-10.

Background skills: Connoisseur (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Savoir Faire (E) IQ+0 [1]-12

Additional Character Elements

To create a more detailed character, the options below allow improvements in skills, offset by a range of disadvantages. A gentleman privateer would benefit from being both an intelligent leader and a good fighter. Wealth, charisma, and fashion sense would increase the privateer's ability to blend in at court, while he could also be an expert in small boats, a diplomatic merchant or a streetwise smuggler.

Disadvantages should reflect a player's preferences. He might be impulsive, overconfident, gluttonous, or greedy. He might be a compulsive risk taker or addicted to opium, laudanum, alcohol, or spice. He might have lost a hand in a duel, had an eye gouged out by a metal shackle attached to a rope flailing in a storm, or have damaged hearing from many battles spent too close to the roar of the cannon. He might be held to a youthful and naïve code of honor, or he might have earned the enmity of any number of people whom he had captured or ruined, or whose relatives he had killed.

Add any number of points from the following, and an equivalent number from the disadvantages list (up to 30 is recommended):

Advantages/Extra Skills And Attributes

Choose from IQ/DX+1[20]; HT+1 [10]; HP + 5 [10]; Basic Speed 6 (also increases Basic Move to 6 [5]; Charisma 2 [10]; Fashion Sense [5]; Wealth (Wealthy) [20]; or for [10] points, choose either 2 primary and 1 secondary skill, or 1 primary skill and 3 secondary skills:

Primary skills [4]

Additional language (accented); Boating or Piloting (Aerospace) (A) DX+1 [4]-13; Diplomacy (H) IQ+0 [4]-12; Merchant (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Streetwise (A) IQ+1 [4]-13.

Secondary skills [2]

Guns (E) DX+1 [2]-13; Any DX-average melee weapon (A) DX+0 [2]-12; Meteorology (A) IQ+0 [2]-12; Search (A) Per+0 [2]-12; Smuggling (A) IQ+0 [2]-12; Swimming (E) HT+1 [2]-12 or upgrade of Patron to Category 5 (large nation).

Disadvantages

Choose from Addiction [Varies]; Code of Honor (Gentleman's) [-10]; Compulsive Gambler [5*]; Debt (5-15% of starting wealth per month) [-5 to -15]; Enemy (equal in power to the PC) [-10*]; Gluttony [-5*]; Greed [-15*]; Hard of Hearing [-10]; Impulsiveness [-10*]; One Hand [-15]; One Eye [-15]; Overconfidence [-5*];

Adventure seeds

A noble privateer campaign can provide a very varied environment for gaming. A group of nobles could become privateers on the same vessel together -- perhaps boyhood friends or the younger sons of nobles from far-flung corners of an Empire brought together by their two years of apprenticeship at court. Alternatively, a gentleman privateer could build a coterie of experts around him: a grizzled sailing master, a bodyguard from a foreign culture, a youth abandoning a dull life on shore for adventure at sea, a courtier with diplomatic contacts fleeing the Royal Entourage following an ill-advised dalliance. Whatever the background of the characters, a number of campaign ideas can work

within the life of a gentleman privateer.

Dangerous Cargo: The capture of a merchant ship yields an unusual prize -- the sister of the ruler of a neighboring state and her commoner lover. The captive begs to be taken to a neutral state and set free in return for an enormous cash payment. Any privateer would know that this captive would be a valuable diplomatic bargaining chip to his own state. He might conclude that he could maximise his ransom, and perhaps secure a pardon for past crimes, by returning the eloping pair home.

Either way, there is likely to be intrigue, double-crossing, and high politics. The spy services of both the enemy nation and the privateer's home country are likely to be on their tail. Finding the right way to extract maximum value from the pair could be a challenge, as would protecting them from those (agents, other pirates, naval forces) who would like to control them.

As an alternative, the commoner lover might be a high-ranking noble in disguise, fleeing after a failed plot to overthrow the monarch and install himself as king after marrying the monarch's sister to secure legitimacy. This would significantly raise the stakes.

A matter of National Importance: The privateer is approached by a disdainful official of the appropriate ruler. An individual has stolen state secrets (or Crown Jewels, or something else of high value but small bulk) and fled the country by sea/spaceship. The government does not want to admit its loss and would like a fast, discreet, and armed ship to track down the thief. A handsome reward is offered.

A description of the ship is provided, and the information that it left harbor only an hour before, heading on a given course.

Navigation and seamanship rolls would be appropriate for determining where the ship was headed, and the GM can lead the players towards a sea-based chase with ship-to-ship action, ranged fire, and boarding, or towards a pursuit through the centre of an enemy land, perhaps where the characters have a price on their heads.

Catching the thief may be only the start of the adventure as returning the loot, potentially through hostile territory, will provide further significant challenges.

Outpost: Intelligence suggests that a foreign outpost (fort, harbor, island, or moon base) has been stripped of defenders to mount an attack elsewhere. The crew has the opportunity to capture and pillage the town against a tiny force. The attacking force returns prematurely, leaving the privateer and his crew with the option of defending or fleeing.

If the scenario was timed to coincide with a need to refit following a previous battle, the option of fleeing may no longer be available, forcing the characters down the path of military heroes.

Colonization: A rival state has discovered a new land (continent, planet, wormhole to a new region in space, whatever). The ruler puts forth a call for adventurers to explore the new world, to forge alliances with native rulers, to secure new colonies, and to harm the rival in every way possible. This is a campaign rather than an adventure, and is likely to include diplomacy, encounters with new civilizations, shipwrecks, and probably new flora and fauna.

Sample Characters

Romegas

Frater (Brother) Mathurin Lescaut Romegas was a member of the Knights of St John of Malta, the Hospitallers. Founded in the 11th century as one of the great Crusading orders, their fortunes waned as they failed to retain their lands throughout the Holy Land. By the mid sixteenth century, they had been beaten back to the island state of Malta, and had refocused their activities into becoming the finest fighting seamen in Europe. In 1565, they endured the Great Siege of Malta, when fewer than 10,000 defenders, only 800 of which were knights, held Malta against the might of

the Ottoman Empire, which sent almost 50,000 troops to capture this barren island in the centre of the Mediterranean.

Romegas was the pinnacle of their talent and renowned as the greatest seamen the Hospitallers ever had. He was one of the most experienced sailors and fighting men in the Order. He had been shipwrecked on several occasions, and once spent an entire night in the upturned hull of a galley capsized in a storm, together with the corpses of his drowned crew. He had also been captured and forced to serve in the galleys of the Turkish fleet until he was ransomed.

He was a natural linguist, speaking Turkish, Arabic, French, Spanish, and Latin, and his experience and wisdom meant that his advice was sought by every Grand Master under which he served.

By the time of the Great Siege, he had demonstrated a hardy toughness in an era of high mortality rates, and was already in his 60s.

Romegas had a very powerful patron in the form of the Hospitallers, accompanied by an extremely hazardous duty to seek out and destroy Muslim vessels, forts and towns, or die trying. Romegas did not possess his own ship. It was the property of the Order, and more than one captain was executed for surviving the loss of his ship. Despite an official vow of poverty, many captains were able to retain some of the wealth from their captured vessels, but the majority was retained by the Order to fund its religious wars.

Romegas represents a man at the peak of his career as a noble privateer, although his focus was on glory more than profit.

Brother Romegas, Knight of St. John   *200 points*

Attributes: **ST** 11 [10]; **DX** 13 [60]; **IQ** 14 [80], **HT** 15 [50]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+1 [0]; BL 24 [0]; HP 11 [0]; Will 14 [0]; Per 14 [0]; FP 15 [0]; Basic Speed 5.5 [-30]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Languages: French (native language) [0]; Latin (accented) [4]; Spanish (accented) [4]; Turkish (accented) [4]; Arabic (broken) [2].

Cultural Familiarity: Islamic [1]

Advantages: Patron (Knights Hospitaller, powerful, with extensive political power, 6 or less) [15]; Rank 5 (Admiral of the Hospitaller fleet) [25]; Reputation 2 (Protector of Christendom, all the time, amongst all Christians living on the Mediterranean shore) [5]; Status 4 (including 2 from Rank) [10]

Disadvantages: Duty (extremely hazardous, almost all of the time, 15 or less) [-20]; Enemy (All Islamic forces, utterly formidable group, 9 or less) [-40]; Reputation -4 (Scourge of Islam amongst all Muslims, large class) [-10]; Vow (Poverty, Chastity, Obedience) [-15]; Hates enclosed spaces [-1]; Obsession (Free as many Christian galley slaves as possible) [-1].

Skills: Area Knowledge (Mediterranean Ports)-15 [2]; Area Knowledge (The Maltese Archipelago)-15 [2]; Astronomy (Observational)-13 [2]; Boating (Unpowered)-14 [4]; Broadsword-14 [4]; Cartography-14 [2]; First Aid-14 [1]; Gunner (Cannon)-13 [1]; Guns (Arquebus)-15 [4]; Leadership-15 [4]; Meteorology-13[1]; Navigation-14 [2]; Polearm (boarding pike)-13 [2]; Savoir Faire (High Society)-14 [1]; Seamanship-15 [2]; Search-13 [1]; Shield-14 [2]; Shiphandling-15 [8]; Swimming-15 [1]; Theology (Christianity)-12 [1].

Captain Don Antonio Juan de Amazas

Don Antonio was born the fourth son of Don Luis de Amazas, a Spanish nobleman from Toledo. As the youngest son, he felt little sense of responsibility, and was always the first to suggest an adventurous activity, whether rafting across the Tagus or exploring the caves in the hills. His charm and intelligence enabled him to escape punishment for his

foolhardiness on many occasions.

At age 16, he was presented at court, and spent the next three years on the fringes of the Royal circle, learning the fine arts of diplomacy and etiquette. His charisma and dress sense made him a popular young man, and many noble daughters were flattered by his attentions. The intrigues of court fostered a rivalry between Don Antonio and another young courtier, Don Alvaro Rodriguez. With a lady's honor at risk, Don Antonio challenged Don Alvaro to a duel. Don Antonio won, leaving his rival with a scarred cheek and an implacable enmity. A Spanish proverb says that revenge is a dish best eaten cold, and Don Alvaro is a patient man.

When Don Antonio was 19, his father died, and while his eldest brother inherited all the estates, Don Antonio received a sizeable legacy. Bored with the courtly life, he sought a letter of marque from the Crown to pursue the war against the British at sea. He paid for and equipped a fast privateer, hired hands and an experienced sailing master and set out to his new life of adventure.

Within four years, Don Antonio had become a successful privateer and knowledgeable sailor in his own right. His manners and sense of honor meant that even those who he captured had few bad words to say about the courtly and entertaining captain of *El Orely y Las Tres.*

Don Antonio Juan de Amazas   *150 points*

Attributes: **ST** 11 [10]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+1 [0]; BL 24 [0]; HP 11 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Languages: Spanish (native language) [0]; English (accented) [4]; French (accented) [4]; Portuguese (accented) [4].

Advantages: Charisma 2 [10]; Fashion Sense [5]; Patron 5 (Kingdom of Spain, 6 or less) [15]; Status 3 (including 1 from Wealth) [10]; Wealthy [20].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Gentleman's) [-10]; Duty (9 or less) [-5]; Enemy (The English, utterly formidable group, 6 or less) [-20]; Enemy (Don Alvaro, individual equal in power to Don, 9 or less) [-10]; Overconfidence (12 or less) [-5]; Reputation -4 (amongst English, a large class, all the time) [-10]; Reputation -1 (amongst everyone except the English, almost everyone except a large class, all the time) [-4].

Skills: Area Knowledge (West and North coasts of the Iberian peninsula)-13 [2]; Astronomy-11 [2]; Boating (small sailing vessels)-13 [4]; Broadsword (Cutlass)-13 [4]; Cartography-12 [2], Connoisseur (Music)-11 [1]; Diplomacy-12 [4]; Gunner (Cannon)-12 [1]; Guns (Pistol)-13 [2]; Leadership-15 (including +2 from Charisma) [4]; Mathematics (Applied)-10 [1]; Navigation-12 [2]; Savoir Faire (High Society)-12 [1]; Savoir Faire (Seafarers)-12 [1]; Seamanship-13 [2]; Shiphandling-13 [8]; Swimming-11 [1]

Niclo Crroe

Niclo Crroe is the fifth son of the Crroe kinship. By tradition, Jonlo, the eldest brother, trained in the arts of politics and diplomacy, while Siman, the second joined the Exarchate Navy. The third son, Annol, was entered into the Church on his seventh birthday. Tradition did not dictate what later sons should do, but by the time he was 17, Niclo knew. Siman's success in the Navy had inspired him, but he knew that he would never amount to anything in the Crroe kinship. He had to secure his own wealth and fame to found a new dynasty: the Niclo kin.

He persuaded a collection of merchants to refit a freighter to his own specification in return for a share of spoils. Niclo achieved significant successes, capturing a number of merchantmen as well as earning the approval of the Exarch through destroying a fleet of Aambulian sunriders on the third moon of Gena. A disastrous encounter with a naval blockading squadron almost destroyed the *Endymion,* and the refit cost almost all the wealth he had earned.

Niclo's ambition is to petition the Exarch for the right to establish a new kinship. He will need to demonstrate wealth, courage, and a clear understanding of the responsibilities of the nobility. The process will take at least six years, and until then, Niclo will continue to fight to bring glory to both his kinships -- the old and the new.

Niclo Crroe   *130 points*

Attributes: **ST** 11 [10]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 13 [60], **HT** 11 [10]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+1 [0]; BL 24 [0]; HP 11 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Languages: Standard Exarchian (Native language) [0]; Aambulian (Accented) [4]

Advantages: Patron 4 (The Exarchate, 6 or less) [13], Status 2 [10]

Disadvantages: Debt (10% of starting wealth per month) [-10]; Duty (raid shipping, 9 or less) [-5]; Enemy (The Aambulia Regime, utterly formidable, 6 or less) [-20]; Obsession (Found a new kinship, long-term goal, 12 or less) [-10]; Reputation -1 (Disdain for privateers from fellow citizens of the Exarchate, all the time, everyone except a large class) [-4]; Reputation -4 (Hatred of pirates by the Aambulia Regime, all the time, large class) [-10]

Skills: Area Knowledge (Home planet)-14 [2]; Astronomy-12 [2]; Beam Weapons (Pistol)-14 [4]; Cartography-13 [2]; Computer Operation-13 [1]; Connoisseur (Gourmet)-12 [1]; Force Sword-13 [4]; Gunner (Beams)-13 [2]; Leadership-14 [4]; Mathematics (Applied)-11 [1]; Navigation [Hyperspace]-12 [1]; Navigation [Space]-13 [2]; Savoir Faire (High Society)-13 [1]; Savoir Faire (Spacers)-13 [1]; Shiphandling (Starship)-14 [8]; Smuggling-12 [1]; Spacer-14 [2]; Streetwise -12 [1].

Further Reading

- For the Knights of St. John and in particular the Siege of Malta: *The Great Siege,* by Ernle Bradford.
- For the life of a sailor, particularly during the Napoleonic Wars, any Jack Aubrey novel by Patrick O'Brian, particularly *The Letter of Marque,* or any Hornblower novel by C.S. Forrester.

Anthropological Roleplaying

by Paul Cardwell

Steve Jackson Games, has a line of game figures called **Cardboard Heroes.** These are strips of light cardboard with the front and rear views of game characters; the strips are folded and weighted. They have the advantage of low cost and light weight, but the disadvantage of being hard to recognize from the side, and -- as with all commercial figures of any kind -- limited in subject matter.

However, it often seems that rather than the figures representing the characters, a lot of roleplayer's characters tend to resemble those figures. They are easy to generate, even when mini-maxing, but they still turn out to be the same old two-dimensional rehash of bad Tolkein, Roddenberry, Lovecraft, and so on.

Some game systems try to force a little variety by having charts of advantages and disadvantages to chose, but even if one takes care to avoid contradictions in those choices, characters can still come out as a collection of statistics, rather than living individuals.

There is a fairly easy way to avoid this problem -- base your characters on real cultures in history. This automatically brings in distinctive features in weapons, armor, trades, view of life, physical size, religion, hobbies, diet, musical instruments, and all the other features that make one character distinctive from another.

As with anything else to achieve this, it is no magic formula. The player pursuing this method may have to spend a little time in the library to get the finer points of the culture. I found this out myself when my northern plains Indian PC advanced to the point of becoming a shaman. Even though I had fairly recently had a graduate course in that field taught by a professor whose specialty was the Lakota religion, I still took a few days working out how this occupation would affect the character *in game terms*. Ultimately, it was no great inconvenience -- all that work was saved and became the basis for the temporal plane shaman data.

Anthropological roleplaying not only provides a source of playing characters, but NPCs and plot hooks as well. How would the band of adventurers react upon seeing some NPC from that culture? More importantly, how would they react about coming on a whole village of this culture? Would they try to conform, or remain aloof? Would they make faux pas according to the etiquette of that culture, and what would be the repercussions? What if there were no common language; how would they communicate? What about trade? The possibilities are endless.

While this list looks ridiculously exhaustive and practically exhausting, it is not. Make a hardcopy, increasing the spaces between lines if you don't want to write small. Go to the library; an academic library of a university offering anthropology is ideal, but it will work with even a rural county library . . . they at least have an encyclopedia. Get their books of the subject and start filling in the blanks. In the academic library, you should be able to get 90% filled in one afternoon; the small public library will take longer, but you can still get there. *Osprey Men-At-Arms, Elite,* and *Warrior* series are excellent because they are a quick read, written by historians, and illustrated based on museum artifacts.

While most of this data relates directly to probable game situations, much of the rest (clothing, weapons, packs, and so on) will enable the gamer to have the proper miniature figures for the character (by conversion or scratch-building), as well as give an additional "feel" to properly design and play this type of character in the game. The research alone will provide a realistic and internally consistent character and enable one to roleplay an in-depth character rather than roll-play a vague, flat stereotype.

To cover these cultures adequately for really in-depth roleplaying, one should fill in the blanks in the following outline as completely as possible. This will be harder with extinct, pre-literate cultures, as most of the evidence will be from archeology, with the rare and often distorted from literate people who came in contact with them (note Herodicas' sometimes fanciful descriptions of the Scythians and others). Even literate ones rarely discussed some of these details, assuming everyone knew about that, and even fewer of these records survived outside desert cultures because the

writing media decayed. Still, the more complete, the more interesting your character will be.

General Features

Correct the Stereotypes

What was the culture really like? Where is it different from the usual concepts of what it was like? In most cases, it is better for game purposes to play the real one, warped slightly to fit the game system you are playing (particularly in regards to magic, but in some cases in regards to clothing where outside the original environment or the like). For example, Arnhem clothing from tropical Australia doesn't work in the Alps, nor Inuit in the Kalahari.

Problems Adapting To The Game

Can someone from this culture even be a playable character? If not, what changes must be made to permit this? If too much adaptation is required, you may be better off to keep the culture as intact as possible and use it strictly for NPCs. Some cultures simply wouldn't adventure under any circumstance; others might have some individual do so, such as Bilbo Baggins, but would be considered just as daft for it.

Place Of PC Groups In NPC Society

If only part of the culture can be suited for gaming, how does that subculture differ and still fit in? A good example of this is using a Japanese character. Most gamers choose either a samurai or a ninja. However, ninja were strictly contract workers hired though several layers of intermediaries and rarely worked in groups. Samurai were bound to a specific warlord and had no chance of independent work unless the lord and heirs were destroyed. These ronin might pick up any job offered, but mainly wanted to find a new lord to serve. Only the musashugyo, a ronin not looking for another lord, but improving martial skills as a religious discipline, would qualify, and they were quite rare.

Social Structure

Form Of Family

Is the family structure:

- nuclear (only parental couple and their children]
- extended (aunts, uncles, and cousins also considered part of the family and live in essentially the same place)
- multigenerational (generally three-generations -- children, parents, and surviving grandparents)
- ainga (all descendents of a common living ancestor)
- or something different?

Is the "head of the family":

- patriarchal
- matriarchal
- both but with clearly defined roles
- or totally egalitarian (which was very rare)?

As an example, with the Polynesian ainga, the head (matai) was literally elected by the family and represented them on the village council.

Marriage And Divorce

Is monogamy or polygamy the common form? If the latter, is it polygyny (multiple wives) or polyandry (multiple husbands, which is rarer)? Is divorce easy or difficult? What are the attitudes toward adultery? (In late-19th-century upper-class Europe, adultery was virtually expected, by both; in others it was a capital offense; most are somewhere in between.) Was there concubinage (which were granted legal status, but children -- while legitimate -- usually did not inherit)?

How Infants Were Carried

Are children carried in the arms, cradleboards, slings, or something else? If not in the arms, are they carried in front or back, upright (facing forward or back) or horizontal, etc.? This is of critical importance if adventuring with infants, and useful in the case of NPCs.

Women As Adventurers

Are female adventurers feasible or not under that culture's attitudes? If possible, would it be permitted with infants? Look beyond the obvious: Sacagawea's main value, beyond adding a couple more languages to the group (ignoring the incredible encounter with her long lost brother just when they needed horses) was that in encounters, Jean Baptiste Charboneau in the cradleboard was considered proof it was a peaceful group.

Social Rank

What is the class structure? There are no truly classless human societies, although in fantasy games a sapient nonhuman species might have one. How much mobility is possible between classes? Does this include downward mobility as well as upward (is there such a thing as a poor noble or is the status lost with the money)?

How Are The Leaders Are Selected?

Is it by heredity, election, ritual combat, merit, examination, or something more exotic? Is it from a limited aristocracy or can anyone with the other qualifications be a leader?

Governmental Size

Is the government decentralized into semi-autonomous subdivisions (tribes, districts, or the like) but still a part of a larger group; centralized with a local bureaucracy under relatively distant control; or small enough for all members to be acquainted?

Economics

What is the basis for economic exchange (coin, metal, rare materials such as shells or pipestone, barter, or something else)? How are inequities adjusted (taxes; giving to others as the main means of social status; other than clothing, most goods are held in common; something different)?

Etiquette And Enforcement

How elaborate are social behavior codes (rigid and a major feature of the culture, informal and flexible, a different set for different situations and/or levels of society)? How are they enforced? Are they part of the legal code, is there loss of status, ostracism, or ridicule? Aer these codes self-enforced through accident or disease? And the like.

Crime and Punishment

Is there a formal legal code (written, recited at public events, oral tradition, etc.)? What is the range of punishments

(fine, exile, imprisonment, death, something else)? How is guilt determined (magic, jury, judge, common belief, a more exotic system)?

Slavery

What is the extent of slavery, and the proportion of slave to free? How are slave obtained (capture, purchase from other cultures, home grown, temporary for payment of debt, or the like)? How oppressive is a slave's life? Is it just another class of society indistinct except for freedom and usually wealth, or are they subhuman or considered a consumable resource? Is there a possibility of freedom, and if so, what is the procedure?

Religion

Cosmology And Pantheon

What is the perception of the gods? Are they remote and only contact their creatures through spirits, departmental (with each deity has jurisdiction over a certain species, occupation, or aspect of life), personal, or something else? Is the culture polytheistic, henotheistic (where they primarily worship one, but acknowledge the existence of -- and occasionally worship -- others)? Monotheistic?

If acknowledged, is the nature of spirits good or bad? What is their relation to creatures and to gods; are they approachable only by shamans or by anyone?

Liturgical Form

What is the nature of their worship (prayer, sacrifice, dance, trance, ritual)? Is it public or private? Is it in consecrated structures, home altars, remote natural places, someplace else? Is pilgrimage practiced?

Magic

Was there a concept of magic and how restricted was its use? Did they have wizards or shamans, and if so, how did they fit into society as a whole (were they respected leaders, just another occupation, or feared outcasts)?

Funeral Custom

How did they dispose of dead?

- Burial (in what position: extended, arms at side or across chest; fetal, on their side or upright; other)?
- Cremation?
- Exposure?
- Excarnation?

Are grave goods (items interred with the body) used?

This information is useful to know if the PC is killed, since most people want to be laid to rest according to their custom.

Art

Graphic And Sculpture

What is the nature of paintings, carvings, decorated pottery and/or basketry? Are there purposes other than/in addition

to aesthetics (religious, ceremonial, educational, something more)?

Music And Dance

What types of instruments are used? Do they accompany singing and/or dancing, or are strictly solo or ensemble? Are dances religious, secular, either, both? Is participation restricted to certain individuals?

Sports And Games

What types of recreation are there, other than those related to work? What is the nature of work-related sports (strictly competitive like rodeo or lightening work like harvest games or barn raising)? Are there professional athletes? Is everyone expected to participate? Are there games of chance? Are there board games? Is storytelling a competitive sport?

Tattoo And Scarification

Is it done, prohibited, or restricted to subgroups? What is the significance? What are the patterns (representational, geometric, or something strange)?

Other

Of course, they could have any form of art that does not fit the above.

Equipment

Housing

What is the architecture? What materials are used? Are such structures considered permanent, temporary, or portable? What are the sleeping facilities (bed, hammock, pallet, on the ground, something else)? Is cooking done inside or outside the main living quarters? What is the bathing tradition (never bathed, steam or dry sweating, stream or lake, something else)? If bathing is done, what's the frequency (several times a day, daily, weekly, for special occasions, only after death)? What are the toilet facilities? (This information can be really difficult to find!)

Public Buildings

Do they have public structures? What kind? What purposes do these building serve -- governmental, religious, recreational, or other? How does the architecture differ from that of other purpose buildings? Is use restricted to certain groups?

Clothing

What types are worn? What materials are used? How are fabrics made (on a type of loom, knitted, felt)? How was skin prepared (rawhide, brain-tanned buckskin, tannic acid, etc.)? What are the differences in clothing by sex and season? Are there sumptuary restrictions (where certain types are worn only by certain classes)? How are they decorated -- with dye, quill, beadwork, or ornaments (metal, fur, shell, feathers, appliqué)?

Food

What foods did they eat? How did they get it: foraging (hunting/gathering), growing (agriculture/herding), trade with other cultures, and so on? How did they preserve food (drying, salting, freezing, smoking, spices, something else)? What is the nature of farms or gardens -- did they use neat rows or haphazard arrangement; plow, dibble stick, or

scattered on the surface; and so on)? What is the distribution system (everyone grows their own, farmers are a separate occupation, grocers, government distribution, something more exotic)?

Packs And Containers

How did they pack things for transport (carried loose, bags, backpack, animal packs, vehicles, etc.)? How did they store items to protect from spoilage or pillage by insects or rodents (pits, jars, baskets, suspended, granaries, or the like)?

Fire-making

How did they make fire: flint sparking, firebow, fire plow, spindle, constantly burning fire (lamp, candle, smoldering punk), etc.? What did they burn: wood, grass, a type of oil, dung, some other fuel type?

Land Transport And Types Of Mounts

How did they cover distance on land: foot, animal mounts, travoix, sleds, wheeled vehicles (type), or some other means? What powered it: members of that culture, dog, horse, ox, reindeer, camel, elephant, or more exotic animals?

Boats

How did they cover distance on water: swim (perhaps assisted by inflated skins, logs, or the like), coracle, canoe/kayak, dugout, constructed boat, ship? What powered it: paddle, oar, sail, or something else?

Weapons

Main Missile Weapon

Type? How made? How used?

Other Missile Weapons

Type? How made? How used?

Main Melee Weapon (Mounted)

Type? How made? How used?

Other Melee Weapons (Mounted)

Type? How made? How used?

Main Melee Weapon (Dismounted)

Type? How made? How used?

Other Melee Weapons (Dismounted)

Type? How made? How used?

Weaponless Combat

What did they do when unarmed and attacked? Did everyone always carried a knife? Did they use fist, grapple, a formally developed martial art (type), or some other means of defense?

Shields

Type? How made? How used?

Armor

Type? How made? How used?

Tactics

Military

How did organized groups use weapons: did they prefer fixed formations or display of individual skill and bravery? Did they use stealth to surround before combat or announce before engagement and try for single combat? And so on. How was mass combat coordinated: drum or bugle signals, flags, some other means?

Individual

How did individuals or a small group (hunting party or raiders) use weapons: stalking, driving over cliff or pre-set enclosure (natural or constructed), concentrating on one target at a time, traps (type), something else? How was it coordinated: hand signals, bird calls, etc.?

Character Stats

Modification to Rolls

What changes (usually in size) are needed to conform primary rolls to physique?

Availability Of Magic

Could everyone use magic or just shamans/wizards? How did one become a shaman or wizard?

Tribal Skills

Are there any particular abilities unique to that culture, such as the ability to domesticate monkeys (southern Asia), use of celestial navigation (Polynesia), shrink heads (Shuar), find water in a featureless desert (Australian aborigine and San), or the like?

Fabulous Beasts

What mythical animals did they believe were real? What ones were acknowledged to be mythical, but were of cultural significance anyway?

References

What books did you use in designing this culture? Sometimes it helps to go back and check on some detail; having your bibliography on hand makes this easier.

Glossary

Aside from the sheer pomposity of the name, the biggest problem with anthropological RPG is that the average gamer is not an anthropologist. Like most fields, it has a language all its own mostly to avoid using a paragraph of definition where a word or two will do.

To remind one of the meaning of unusual words, the same thing would apply to that culture's unique items, concepts, ways of using items, and so on, such as the names of the parts of armor, or metaphysical concepts. For instance, the Scythians did not use stirrups, but trained their horses to kneel in sort of a show-horse bow, and mounted, leg over the withers -- very useful if heavily armored or wounded. They also carried their sword on the right, pointing forward and drew it by swinging the arm back; the left side held the bow and arrows in a gorytos. Thus the sword rested on the thigh when mounting and nothing got tangled up.

It is strongly encouraged that the reader examine as many of these books and articles as possible. This will guard against errors in one source. While not as frequent or severe as in modern times, there were changes in style during the periods described, just as in our own time, the difference being more due to our rapid communication than anything else.

For a character designed with a long-running campaign in mind, the quality of the characters produced by this method will more than compensate for the time spent on the research.

The City in the Storm

by Martin Jenner

A chill wind howled across the plains, baring winter's teeth. Frojac shivered atop his mount, glancing uneasy at the sky. The sun was bright and clouds skimmed lazily across the empty blue, except in the west where they piled high like water behind a dam. He stared, a frown creasing his sunburned face. Something wasn't right. The herd were scattered around him, great horned heads lowered to munch contentedly at the grass before winter buried it in snow. The other herders were distant, watching for the telltale signs of a grassdog pack nearby. Frojac turned his gaze skywards once more, the wind whipping his hair across his face. The cloudbank seemed closer, looming large and dark.

"Frojac!" The young herder flinched, turning to see Herdmaster Runthia's baleful glare. Beyond him the settlement sat squat and gleaming against the green plains, remote and fragile. "Quit daydreaming, boy!"

"Yes herdmaster," Frojac mumbled obediently. "Only . . ."

"What?" Runthia snapped.

"That cloud . . ."

The herdmaster peered up as though seeing the sky for the first time. Frojac followed his gaze, missed seeing the old man's leathery skin pale. The cloud was thick and black, boiling overhead. Actinic flashes lit the depths, the rumble of thunder like stampeding cattle a second later. The herders were all looking and pointing now, their cries lost in the rising gale.

"Herdmaster, I don't understand," Frojac said, pushing his mount close to Runthia's. "How can a storm move against the wind?"

Thunder roared. The world was dark now, as though the sun had never been. Lightning tore the sky asunder. Runthia turned.

"Ride," he said. Something broke through the cloud's leading edge, dark and angular. Frojac watched, open-mouthed. "Ride." The mass above grew, clouds pouring from its tortured stone. The herdmaster yanked on Frojac's reins, wheeling his mount about, and slapped the beast's flank. The horse screeched and leapt into a gallop, slipping easily through the long grass. "Warn them!" Frojac heard through the thunder. "Tell them Stormrider comes!"

Lying flat against the body of his mount, the wind screaming in his ears, Frojac raced the storm for home.

The Legend

Some 50 years after the end of the world, the city of Reno was destroyed. Reports from traders spoke of buildings leveled, parks uprooted and bodies littering the streets. The few survivors spun described a terrible storm that descended and hung over the city like a shroud while monstrous, inhuman raiders scoured the streets, looting and murdering. Where these bandits came from, none knew.

Time passed and more stories came in. Tales of towns and cities ruined and their people dead or stolen away, and always those lucky few spoke of the great dark storm that swept over the settlement, a harbinger of doom. Years would pass and the Storm would fade, forgotten, then a traveler would bring news of another isolated settlement razed to ash and bone and people would remember, would begin to fear again. Mothers threatened their children, "go to bed or the Storm Riders will get you," and for the last three centuries the people of this shattered Earth have kept one wary eye on the skies above. Most believe the tales little more than fables, something to thrill the children and excuse the actions of humanity's dregs. Perhaps they are correct, those ravaged settlements simply the unlucky target of desperate

men and women, yet still the legend lives on. Only the dead know the truth of the matter and they keep their secrets well.

The Reality

The dead are not alone in holding the secrets of the Storm Riders, but those who know are in no position to share their knowledge. Stolen away under cover of rain and battle, they are bound and blindfolded, abused and beaten. While most are left as corpses, some are taken alive when the raiders leave.

At the heart of the great storm there is a city, a place known simply as the Rock. Thunder rolls across its stones and lightning crackles from tower to tower, seeking release; it is here those taken by the raiders are brought. The kidnapped see for the first time that their devilish captors are only human, the residents of this strange place.

How the city remains airborne few ever learn, for their role is to play slave to the raiders who call this home. Each raid brings back only a handful of captives, but they are sorely needed for dangerous works and few survive for long. But it is not the need for fresh slaves that drives the city's inhabitants to plunder and destroy, rather the simple need for food and water. So it goes that the raiders must strike again, scouring another settlement from the Earth to feed their hunger.

Some slaves, should they live long enough, manage to become raiders themselves, issued an antique firearm far more sophisticated than anything remaining on the surface. They see for the first time the ancient helicopters that first carried them away from their homes in chains. How the raiders came into possession of such aged marvels the ex-captives may never know.

Some among the Rock's inhabitants know the truth, quiet men and women in smart uniforms. They serve in the Vault, deep in the heart of the Rock. Here the tunnel walls are smoother, the floors flat and the doors fashioned from solid steel. From within these well-worked tunnels the storm is controlled, but to ask of the Vault is to invite brutal punishment, a lesson few slaves need to experience more than once.

The Place

The Rock is more than just a base for the raiders it is a city in its own right, with parks and markets and civilian residents. The tunnels that honeycomb the dark stone are home to nearly three thousand people, and space is the greatest luxury. Large, open hangers house the Rock's ancient helicopters and their support staff, while nearby wells hold the precious fuel they need to function. While much of the cave system is taken up with storerooms, primitive factories and the sprawling secrets of the Vault, the vast majority of the Rock's internal labyrinth consists of living quarters. The mass of people inside the Rock is growing steadily and most captured slaves find themselves put to work carving ever-narrower tunnels and quarters from the hard black stone in order to make room.

On the upper surface of the Rock, in the heart of the eternal storm where lightning blasts great jagged splinters from the stone and thunder roars load enough to deafen, ugly towers rise into the clouds. The tallest is a dozen stories high, its walls shattered and burned by lightning strikes, but most are far lower. It is here that the majority of the raiders' captives are housed. Even the rough underside is not wasted, slaves inhabiting inverted towers that hang down towards the earth. Every building is streaked with copper lightning conductors in an effort to deflect the storm's fury, yet a handful of buildings are ruined each year by lightning and both above and below the Rock the surface swarms with construction crews. Surface duty is essentially a death sentence; those slaves assigned to it the troublesome and the useless. In a similar fashion the roles of supervisor and foreman are often given as punishments to citizens or raiders who defy the Rock's rough justice.

Back within the Rock itself the population live in cramped discomfort, each person receiving an allocation of space according to rank, wealth and status. Only the richest and most powerful have the luxury of separate living and sleeping areas, while the poorest families share single rooms no larger than three square meters. Slaves are even more unfortunate. Crammed by the hundred into large caverns they sleep pressed tight against one another and yet are thankful, because even such crowded halls are better than the flimsy slave-towers on the surface.

At the center of it all lies the Vault. Those privileged few who enter learn the true way of things, the history forgotten by raiders and citizens alike. They alone know that the Vault is what remains of a military installation from the old world, built to hold scientists and technicians as they worked at secret, hidden projects. The people of the Rock are the descendants of scientists who worked on those projects and the soldiers who guarded them though little evidence remains to prove it, even in the Vault.

Regardless of its origins the Vault is critical to the Rock's existence. Within its maze of smooth-cut passages colossal generators work ceaselessly, powering everything from the dim lights that make subterranean life possible to factories and hydroponics labs. The massive fans that drive fresh air out into the tunnels and caverns of the Rock are here too, breathing life into the city.

Vital as these systems are, they are nothing compared to the real secret of the Vault: the technology that keeps millions of tons of rock and metal from crashing back to earth where it rightfully belongs. In the midst of all the tunnels and administrative departments that keep the city running smoothly, between the raiders' headquarters and the assembly room of the city's ruling council, there is the Helmsman's chamber.

Here men and women scurry back and forth, cursing their own ignorance. The room is packed with instruments and the Rock's last remaining computer. The walls are white, the floor and ceiling the same, and the busy scientists are pristine in white coats and gloves. Yet for all this activity, for all the wonders of the old world gathered here, it is neither the white-coats nor their equipment that draws the eye. It is the bare rock of the fourth wall, bare rock from which something blue and silver protrudes. A single figure kneels before it as though in prayer, his hands pressed against its molten, ever-shifting form. He appears young. His eyes are closed and his lips move constantly, silently mouthing words in an unknown tongue. Long ago an attempt was made to move him, to excavate more of the strange device that binds him. It nearly ended in disaster, sending the young man into a thrashing fit and the Rock plummeting. The young man's identity, his name or station, are long forgotten, for in three hundred years he has neither aged a day nor spoken anything but gibberish. Yet that he still understands is clear, for through commands whispered in his ear the rulers of the Rock can steer their misshapen chariot. He is called Helmsman, and he is a mystery.

The People

The city in the storm's inhabitants can be divided into three groups: raiders, citizens and slaves. The raiders are the most respected and the oldest, present long before there were slaves to serve them or citizens to support them. The citizenry are the largest group, comprised of support staff, merchants, entertainers and a hundred other professions a city needs. While the Rock is still officially under the control of the military and the "citizens" themselves born into the armed forces, their military connections are for the most part quietly ignored.

The raiders would like to believe themselves something better, having little respect for the merchants and technicians who keep life running smoothly about them. Clashes between raiders and citizens are commonplace and while the Rock's rulers frown upon such quarrels, they tend to overlook their troops' aggressive behavior. While the raiders might consider themselves heirs to a fine military tradition they are but poor shadows, leeched of their principles by time and necessity. The Rock's selection and training methods are aimed at producing hard, ruthless killers who obey orders without question, so a certain amount of casual violence is accepted as inevitable. Only the most serious transgressors are ever punished, sent out to supervise slaves in the building and rebuilding of the lightning-shattered towers that cover the Rock's blasted shell. What is certain is that conflict between raiders and citizens would be far more common were it not for the slaves within the Rock. Without any rights at all a slave is an easy target for torment or abuse, despite complaints from the more moral citizens. Those voices are lost, however, overwhelmed by the weight of apathy among their peers who have never known life without slaves to serve them. Most of the Rock's inhabitants give little thought as to what their lives must have been like before their capture. Slaves have always been there, somewhat less than human.

Among the Rock's rulers, uncertainty is rife. Some have begun to question the institution of slavery, as well as the necessity of plundering weaker settlements for the sake of improving their own. Others care little for such concerns, concentrating instead on planning and carrying out raids to the exclusion of all else. A turning point has been reached,

one that could see the Rock take the first step towards restoring the world that was, or see it squander that promise and descend into savagery. The factions are evenly matched, and things are coming to a head. One way or another, the city in the storm will never be the same again.

The Truth

Back when the world was whole there was a rumor that never seemed to fade. It spoke of a military base out in the desert, a place where scientists poked and prodded strange artifacts of unknown origin, hoping to understand their mysteries. Despite all the denials, that little base beneath the Nevada desert actually existed. In the dark rock beneath the sand the American military guarded their blackest secret, for long before something bright and shining had fallen to Earth. The base grew up around it and generation after generation of America's brightest minds studied that half-buried thing. All failed, yet still they tried. Even while the world collapsed around them the scientists worked to no avail. Isolated, deniable, self-sufficient, the base lived on. Years passed and younger men and women, the children on the original personnel, took their parents' place. None expected the riddle to be solved, but one day the ground began to shake.

Rushing to the lab those young scientists found one of their number bowed before the device, his hands pressed against it and strange words pouring from his mouth. As the base tore free of the ground, pulling a great mass of stone up with it, the Helmsman's eyes closed and his voice faded to silence. He has never moved again.

As that colossal bulk rose into the sky above the ruined desert the storm clouds began to gather. From nothing they appeared, swirling around the mass of the base as if to hide its unreality from the eye. Thunder rolled and lightning flashed; Stormrider was born.

The Adventures

Stormrider is designed to slide easily into any modern Earth-based post-apocalyptic campaign, but with a few minor alterations it can be used in any setting. Transplanting the city from Earth to another world is as simple as changing a few names, while it could be converted to suit a fantasy campaign by replacing the mysterious technology which drives it with some ancient and forgotten magic. The ex-military raiders could be swapped for a cult or organization looking to change the world for the better no matter what the cost.

The floating city could be used in a variety of different ways. The legend could be mentioned in the hearing of the PCs to give the setting flavor or the tale could be foreshadowing, setting the scene for a later encounter. Alternatively Stormrider could be the center of the campaign, with PCs living aboard the Rock or captured during a raid and enslaved. Finally, the PCs might be what passes for the law in their area or the lucky survivors of a raid, determined to stamp out the bloodthirsty murderers who have brought misery and death to so many over the centuries.

How you use the Rock and its Stormriders is up to you, but here are some adventure hooks that might fire the imagination.

From The Outside, Looking In

Fuel is a problem. The helicopters and generators that keep Stormrider functioning and its soldiers raiding require gasoline, and the Rock's supplies are dwindling. In desperate need of fuel, the city's rulers turn their attentions on a half-functioning refinery run by an ally of the PCs. With so much refined gasoline lying around an attack in the usual fashion would be risky, so the Stormriders try a different tactic subterfuge.

When the world ended the crust was torn and battered, opening great fissures leading deep inside the Earth. While exploring one such fracture, the PCs discover something strange. Something . . . alien. And aboard the Rock, hundreds of miles away, the Helmsman opens his eyes and screams . . .

The PCs arrive in a town to find it a barren husk, stripped of valuables and living settlers. Are the legendary Storm

Riders responsible, or has some other threat risen to menace the area? The PCs must investigate the carnage and discover whether surrounding settlements are at risk.

From Within The Storm

Aboard the Rock, things are not well. The storms that ravage its outer crust are growing stronger and more brutal and a rumor prevails that these environmental effects are not even deliberate, rather that they are a result of damage to whatever keeps the city flying. Tensions are high and many of the citizens call for the city to be grounded until the problem can be rectified.

Space within the Rock is rapidly becoming all used up. The community is thriving and if such growth continues people will soon be forced to sleep in the hangars, storerooms and narrow tunnels. Many are calling for a reduction in slave numbers to make room, while others say it is time to begin changing the world for the better. The Rock is split in too, and conflicts between the two sides are increasing in regularity and violence.

Someone is preaching rebellion to the slaves, calling on them to rise against their oppressors and claim the Rock for their own. Who is this hidden leader, and does he have the slaves' welfare at heart?

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Things I Hate as a GM

This isn't one of my single-thought columns, nor is it quite one of my column-loaf installments (made from real column pieces chunked and formed into a column shape). Rather, it's a collection of some top-of-the-head musings as to Things I Hate As a GM. Besides direct sequels to this column, it immediately suggests three other related sequels.

Anyway, these aren't necessarily my biggest pet peeves (although, having sprung to mind relatively quickly, they're probably near the top), nor are they arranged in any particular order of dislike (although, with three entries in this installment, there's a one-in-six chance that they are).

And now, without further ado . . .

* * *

Any type of ability to detect lies. I cannot express how much I, as a GM, despise the ability to detect lies. This one ability cuts down entire swaths of adventure potential; the more foolproof the method is, the more whole *genres* of adventures are eliminated. Practically every mystery, cop show, diplomatic tale, thriller, and romance story revolves around deceit or lies at some point. And the way this ability is structured in most games, there isn't any disincentive to detect lies on every statement made by someone else.

PLAYER: Sooo . . . we suspect you might have had something to do with the murder of Dr. Suerte. Did you have anything to do with his murder?

GM (AS SUSPECT): No.

PLAYER: Detect lies.

GM (rolling and sighing): You suspect he's lying.

PLAYER: Ah HAH!

GM: Yeah, listen. I'm going to the kitchen to get a Mountain Dew.

PLAYER: Detect lies.

GM: All right. *And* some Chex Mix.

Some games go even further; I remember feeling my heart sink as the fledgling GM of an ***In Nomine*** game when the full power of the truth-detecting Seraphim became known. Not only was there not much real protection from their supernatural means of detecting lies (especially from mortals), there were few restrictions keeping such characters from using their abilities constantly, *and* there was a 1-in-6 chance that they would learn what the truth was (presuming the character knew the truth). In other words, you ask your prime suspect six times "What did you do with the body?" and -- if he knows -- then you've got a 66% chance of knowing that cadaver's exact fate.

The ability to detect lies means that, to run the kind of mystery games I like (and that my players seem to enjoy), I need to rely on more and more contrivances. ("Ah-ha! He *was* telling the truth . . . but he'd been hypnotized into believing he saw that!")

Games present and future, hear my warning: Detect lies is to gaming as DNA is to mystery stories; if you include it, then half the GM/writer's time will be spent trying to figure out how it *doesn't* apply.

* * *

Settings that don't tell me something crucial I need to know to run the darn thing. (This one bugs me as a player,

too.) When gaming in others' RPG universes, I'm amazed at how often a future book will contain some piece of information that was somehow left out of the core book. Sometimes these are mere errata oversights (such as the Second Edition of *Wraith: The Oblivion,* which [forgot to mention](#) how to regain the Pathos points so essential to power and fuel certain effects). And the supers game *Brave New World* contained enough metaplot that I would've been terrified to run anything there for the first few months, lest some introduced fact I believe to be trivial turns out to be vitally important and game disruptively wrong.

I'm trying to remember any amusing or annoying anecdotes that stem from this, but failing; the only anecdotes I'm coming up with involve characters I've made (which, I suppose affected my GM from the other way). I seem to recall that the First Edition of *Fading Suns* didn't give a good idea for how big the jumpgates that connect the stars were; I knew they were big enough for spaceships to pass through, but assumed them to be akin to, say, the size of a space station. As a result, my character's origin, had a basis, an unlikely collision between two ships around the jumpgate. But it wasn't until a later book that I realized *how* unlikely it was; it turns out they're about half the size of a moon . . . meaning that the odds of two ships colliding around the sparsely used gates was about the same as finding a specific person at random in [Canada](#). Whoops.

Another time, when I made a character for our *Vampire: The Dark Ages* game, I learned in a sourcebook that all vampires part of one bloodline were only turned into vampires if offered a choice. Whoops . . . turns out it was *almost* all in our campaign.

Perhaps in a complex and interlocked enough universe it's unavoidable that such facts will come to light during a game . . . especially if it's evolving and being added to. But that doesn't mean that I don't dislike it, and it's probably one of the reasons that I'm drawn to [canceled game lines](#).

* * *

Any rule mechanic that interferes with my "Roll the dice and see how pretty they look" system. I confess that I don't always have time to make NPCs or determine exact difficulty numbers or any of the things that a "real" GM is supposed to do. And I suspect that I'm not alone in this regard.

Fortunately, I learned early on that -- in most games -- I don't need to do know exactly what I'm doing. For example, in a game such as the ***D6 System,*** it doesn't really matter if the exact difficulty number is 16 or 19 if the player rolls a 26. And games such as ***GURPS*** are even better, with their "roll low" task resolution system; if the player rolls a 4 on that 3d6, I know he almost certainly succeeded.

I've abstracted this philosophy into the "Roll the dice and see how pretty they look" system. Basically, if I don't necessarily know the difficulty number, I'll usually ask the player to roll anyway; the better the roll, the greater the chance of success. Only if the roll isn't clear (they didn't roll obviously well or obviously poorly) do I actually devote my precious brain CPU cycles to determining if they succeeded or not.

Unfortunately, some game systems seem to mess with this seemingly simple concept. One of the difficulties I've had in running the ***d20 System,*** for example, is the relative graininess of the system coupled with many player's expectations of mathematical precision in the game. Since it's a linear die roll directly affected by a modifier or an opposed roll, the odds of rolling a 9, 12, or 14 are all the same; if the difficulty number and the roll both fall somewhere in that range -- which is most of the time -- then I need to figure out exactly whether or not it succeeded.

But by far the RPG I've had the worst time using my RtD&SHPTL system is the original ***Fading Suns.*** In this game, all success rolls are made using a d20 against a difficulty number. At this point it's like the *Price Is Right:* The closer the die roll is to the target number without going over, the more successes. So if the difficulty number is an 11, a roll of 10 is good while a roll of 12 is a failure. Oh, and an exact roll is a critical success, where the number of successes are doubled. And these difficulty numbers are directly affected by modifiers. So, for example, let's say a player tries to shoot a bad guy with a blaster; let's say his normal difficulty a 12, and he rolls a 14. Now, I find myself needing to ask, "Are there any modifiers that would change that result and make it easier with a modifier of +2? Because if so, it goes from being a missed shot to being one the best possible outcome he can have. Even worse, the number of successes is important, so even if a roll is obvious -- for example, a 1 always succeeds -- the result still isn't (since a

roll of 1 always results in one success, which often isn't enough to get results). More often than not the entire system was a colossal headache for me.

Nowadays a game would have to be *really* interesting for me to overlook this fundamental deficit in my style of play . . . and even then, I'd probably be more inclined to convert the setting to another game line instead.

* * *

Of course, if these spark any related thoughts or personal peeves, feel free to mention to me via [e-mail](#) or over on the [message boards](#); I'll be happy to steal the best ideas for a future easy column.

--Steven Marsh

Jincheng

by Paul Drye

After a disastrous invasion by the Mongols in the 14th century, the Chinese Empire carries on from the West Coast of North America. Jincheng is the greatest of its cities, on the site of Homeline's San Francisco. It's also been the home of both a lucrative White Star Trading outpost and a Paralabs facility for the last 15 years. Unfortunately, the reason for the lab is coming to the fore: in Jincheng it's late March of 1906, and the Great Earthquake is due in a few weeks. Infinity is working to get all its personnel out of the city with 48 hours, but the project is complicated.

The Setup

It's been more than six centuries since Sartaq Khan swept out of the northern steppes and conquered northern China. As far as Infinity has been able to determine, the change point on this timeline came several decades earlier in the convoluted succession crises that followed Genghis Khan's death. Different leaders led the campaigns in East Asia, and the wars ran somewhat differently. In the end, the important change was that Southern China stayed independent longer, and the more adventurous and trade-oriented Cantonese had more room to develop their own Chinese culture. Offshoot kingdoms were founded in the Philippines and Hawaii, and eventually North America was discovered by an unknown sailor. When the Empire finally collapsed under Mongol assault, there were several hundred thousand Chinese in the New World, from Baja California to Vancouver Island. Cut off from the wellspring of Chinese civilization, they drifted into independence. By the dawn of the 20th century, there were more than 20 million of them.

Jincheng is the capital of Dankuo, the "Dawn Country," a teeming pre-industrial metropolis of some 300,000 people. As well as being large and politically important, it is also the main trade entrepot on the east side of the Pacific, with contacts spreading north to the Native American country of Haida Gwaii and south to the Chimu inheritor kingdoms in Peru. Between the sophisticated technology the Chinese brought to the Americas and the gold fields to the east of Jincheng, the city is the center of two continents.

This is the sort of thing that interests White Star Trading, and since the timeline was discovered 15 years ago, they've built up a lucrative business trading luxuries like pepper and tropical fruits for various products of the Empire.

The other major Homeline presence is scientific. On Homeline, California was hit with numerous earthquakes from 1850 to 1906, all a prelude to the Great Earthquake. For the last few years, the University of Nevada has been running an earthquake research project in conjunction with Paralabs, studying the impending quake here and on other timelines approaching 1906. By observing the same event multiple times, they're hoping to get an understanding of these disasters beyond anything known even on more advanced (but non-parachronic) timelines.

The quake is going to be so intense, though, that both the project and White Star have been ordered to close up operations no later than 48 hours before the Homeline date for the quake: April 16th. Unfortunately, there's a lot of

resistance to the order. On a few timelines, the quake never happened, and some of White Star's people are concerned that closing down even for a short period of time will be costly; they think it's better to just get out of the city, and don't worry about not being able to get back to Homeline easily for the few weeks it takes until Jincheng is back under control and this side of the conveyor can open again. Similarly, several scientists want to stay so they can monitor the quake as it occurs. They're of the opinion that, since they know it's coming, they can prepare and ride out the worst of the disaster. The data they could obtain by not running their equipment on auto-pilot would make it worthwhile.

Meanwhile, back on Homeline there is agitation from Miracle Workers to do something about the disaster. It's generally agreed that they'll be involved once the quake hits, but some are arguing that they need to take pre-emptive action. A little preparation could save quite a few lives. The difficulty is how to go about doing it. Unless they're careful, outtime personnel might attract unwanted questions in the days following the disaster if someone remembers them doing unusual things beforehand.

There is every chance that someone will be left behind, either by chance or deliberate resistance to Infinity's evacuation order. The GM is left to arrange that the group plays some of the unlucky ones.

The City

Jincheng was once a ramshackle affair, but as it grew in importance it was rebuilt each time it burned down (as pre-industrial cities are wont to do). Now it's laid out on a classic Chinese square grid, in a rectangle about 2.5 miles by 1.5 miles bounded approximately by the Homeline locations of Van Ness Avenue and 16th Street.

The more north and west one goes in Jincheng, the better off the citizens. The northern reaches of the city, along the channel between the bay and the Pacific, are the site of various Imperial residences and those of his family. This includes the large Three Hares Palace (named after the symbol of the current dynasty, who built it) on Telegraph Hill, which is the seat of government. The palaces are surrounded by gardens and the whole system is enclosed in a large wall -- the closest thing to Beijing's Forbidden City that one will find on this timeline, though it's become more open in recent centuries.

The city's richest non-noble citizens cluster to the west, outside the city walls where the land starts to rise in a series of hills and ridges. It's been 200 years since Jincheng was seriously threatened by an invader, and in that time the protection of the walls has become unnecessary to some; still, small private armed forces are quite common in the estates.

The hills to the southwest of the city are largely empty and devoted to religious buildings of amazing diversity, mostly Buddhist and Taoist temples, and a few mosques. The Ji Jingjiao ("Jade Christian") Temple is also here, and is the home to a small, unusual offshoot of Nestorian Christianity. It's not important in the grand scheme of things, but it's become known to outtimers because of its unusual, high quality architecture and sacred art.

Docks and markets dominate the eastern shore of the city, inside the bay. They are as busy as any in the world between a large fishing fleet and an immense amount of trade going along the coast and as far out as Hawaii and even the Philippines. There are dozens of ships docked on any given day, and an uncounted number of small vessels. The lower half of the city feeds off this business, and contains 80% of the city's population. Other major market places are strung along the southern edge of the city and sell rice and produce from the farms the stretch the rest of the way down the peninsula. The net effect is to make the portion of the city where foreigners (and so also outtimers) live very busy, dusty, and stifling. Fortunately Jincheng was rebuilt along a strict grid after the last great fire ninety years ago and the regulations introduced at the time haven't let the poorer neighborhoods become warrens, not yet anyway.

The quarter of the city between the poor districts and the Imperial city to the north is the home of Jincheng's small middle class. It consists entirely of government officials and middling merchants on their way up to living in the west of the city. Actual industry, no matter how enriching, is restricted to the poor districts.

The Disaster

The morning of April 16th is unseasonably foggy, and about 15 minutes before dawn -- while the night is apparently still dark -- the quake will begin. The cooking and heating fires of early risers will start numerous small fires in damaged and destroyed buildings, causing a major problem in the primarily wooden city. Jincheng has a very elaborate firefighting system in place, with the 2,000 soldiers of the garrison under standing order to pitch in. Signal flags and runners are assigned to coordinate the response. Unfortunately the Imperial Palace is in one of the less-stable areas, and the minister in charge of running everything is severely injured when one of the outbuildings collapses.

There is then a major aftershock at 8:14 AM; many buildings damaged by the earlier shifting collapse completely. Within a few hours a few fires that were not caught have expanded into infernos, and it becomes obvious that much of the town is going to be destroyed. The fire brigades start to get their efforts together under the command of Imperial Prince Wai-Keung, and they start building firebreaks by destroying buildings along several major streets.

Despite their efforts, serious fires will continue for three days and more than a third of the city -- primarily in the poorest blocks to the south and east -- will burn down. Most of this area was flattened or severely damaged first, and another quarter of the city will have been destroyed by the quake but escape the fire. The rest of Jincheng will escape relatively unscathed, though there's hardly a building that doesn't have something cracked or broken in its structure.

From the end of the first day, the ongoing problem will be the people of Jincheng. About 20,000 people will be killed if events continue without major outtime intervention spurred by the players' characters. Unless that unlikely event comes to pass, the city will be dealing with homelessness, disease, and lack of food and water for several weeks. Temperatures at night will drop to under 50°F. Social chaos will break out if basic needs aren't met; fortunately the Imperial Army will be ordered to send as many troops as they can into the city from the surrounding region, so there will be some authority for outtimers to fall back on.

Most serious for Infinity personnel left behind, the quake was so severe as to disrupt crosstime travel into the region. Any scientists left behind will be beside themselves with excitement, as this is the first good observation of even a small reality quake being hooked to real-world events, but the practical issue is that Jincheng will be cut off from the rest of the multiverse until the afternoon of April 19th. The GM should feel free to alter this time for dramatic purposes if need be, and should remember that the players should have no idea if the connection will come back.

People

Qhispi: A traveler from Taypikala, a large South American kingdom in the approximate location of Southern Peru. Qhispi is the de facto ambassador to the emperor of Dankuo. Relations between the two states are good, so he doesn't actually spend much time at the court, instead running a large trading concern that ships goods back and forth along the Pacific coast.

Taypikalans don't generally use full names unless they're necessary, and in Jincheng there are sufficiently few of them that personal names are all that are needed. Qhispi has a particular reason to obscure his, however: it is Qhispi Inti Vilca, or "Qhispi, Prince of the Blood." He is the sixteenth son of the current emperor through one of his lesser wives and, while Ohispi will likely never inherit, he is going to be a powerful man some day. He's in Jincheng at the order of his royal father in order to learn practical administration and politics before he's given some town to administer. Only the Imperials, some of their assistants, and a few other Taypikalans in Jincheng know who he is.

Qhispi's role in any adventure is to be a fellow outsider to Dankuo who has already got used to their ways and can supply GM's exposition as needed. Later, he can be a bridge to the Imperial family in Jincheng if the players decide they should contact the upper reaches of the city's government.

He is a short Native American man in his early twenties, with an angular face, high rounded cheekbones, and short black hair parted in the middle. He is the altruistic type, but in a basic "noblesse oblige" way related to his mission rather than out of true conviction. His first instinct is towards conservatism -- a common failing among his people -- but he has a fatal weakness for the opposite sex; away from the court for the first time, he's getting his chance to really indulge and hasn't got bored of it yet. Luckily for him, it always seems to work out despite his not being able to

leverage his noble blood without blowing his cover. He's managed to dodge vengeful husbands and unfortunate pregnancies with remarkable ability.

Qhispi Inti Vilca   *140 points*

Human; 5'5"; 160

Attributes: **ST** 10 [0]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 10 [0].

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 10 [0].

Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Block 9 (Shield (Buckler)); Dodge 8; Parry 9 (Shortsword).

Social Background

TL: 4 [0].

CF: Andean [1]; Dankuo [1].

Languages: Aymara (Native) [0]; Cantonese (Accented/Broken) [3].

Advantages

Appearance (Attractive) [4]; Claim to Hospitality 2 [2]; Cultural Adaptability [10]; Fearlessness 1 [2]; Patron (King of Taypikala) 1 (9 or less) [10]; Rank (Apparently a Rich Merchant) 5 [25]; Smooth Operator 1 [15].

Disadvantages

Code of Honor (Quasi-Feudal Noble) -1 [-5]; Lecherousness (12 or less) [-15]; Reputation (Ladies Man) -1 (Almost everyone; All the time) [-5]; Secret Identity (Serious Embarrassment) [-5].

Quirks: Brags about his people when fighting; Gets Seasick; Sensitive About His Appearance; Staid [-4].

Skills

Administration-13 (IQ+1) [4]; Area Knowledge (San Francisco Bay Area)-14 (IQ+2) [4]; Diplomacy-14 (IQ+2) [8]; Intimidation-12 (Will+0) [1]; Savoir-Faire (Dankuo Nobility)-15 (IQ+3) [4]; Sex Appeal-14 (HT+4) [8]; Shield (Buckler)-12 (DX+1) [2]; Shortsword-13 (DX+2) [8]; Survival (Mountain)-11 (Per-1) [1]; Wrestling-10 (DX-1) [1].

Mui Kailun: Inspector Mui is one of many tax inspectors devoted to watching imports into Jincheng. He is small and rumpled, but also very observant and incorruptible, two characteristics that make him a good inspector but keep him from rising very far in the service. He is also seemingly unable to close a case, though he often stirs up a lot of trouble before the object of his attention somehow wriggles away from justice.

If Qhispi is a help to outtimer adventurers, Kailun is a hindrance. His role is to be the intelligent, overly curious native who threatens The Secret. He will already be wondering about the Infinity outpost because they're likely physically unique in Jincheng -- Europe is no more advanced than Dankuo on this timeline, and he's never met an African. If the outtimers start to act strangely, he may be inspired to dig more deeply, and can cause severe problems for the characters even if they are merely trying to help. The reckoning may be delayed until the crisis is over, but the attention they're trying to avoid will eventually come. GMs looking to add an extra moral quandary to adventures in ruined Jincheng may want to make the Inspector a personal friend of one character, or at least sufficiently likable that the group will want to avoid his being kidnapped and sent to Coventry.

Inspector Mui is a male East Asian with particularly dark skin (hinting at some ancestor from perhaps Indonesia), and neck-length hair; he has a small braid hanging down on either side of his eyes in the current style for civil servants. He tends to watch and stay silent for some time, then once he starts to speak it is nearly impossible to get him to shut up -- a personality quirk of which he is profoundly aware and constantly apologizing for as he continues to talk.

Mui Kailun   *125 points*

Human; 5'3"; 130

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 11 [10].

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 11 [2]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 11 [0].

Basic Speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 9 (Shortsword).

Social Background

TL: 4 [0].

CF: Dankuo [1].

Languages: Cantonese (Native) [0]; Aymara (Accented) [4]; Nahuatl (Broken) [2]; Salishan Indian (Broken) [2]; Tarahumara Indian (Broken) [2].

Advantages

Eidetic Memory [5]; Legal Enforcement Powers 1 [5].

Disadvantages

Appearance (Unattractive) [-4]; Curious (12 or less) [-5]; Duty (To investigate traders) (12 or less (quite often)) [-10]; Honesty (12 or less) [-10]; Stubbornness [-5]; Unluckiness [-10].

Quirks: Uses quotes from literature to illustrate a point; Talks too much and is embarrassed by it; Wears old clothing [-3].

Skills

Accounting-11 (IQ-1) [2]; Area Knowledge (Dankuo Docks)-14 (IQ+2) [4]; Boating/TL4 (Unpowered)-11 (DX-1) [1]; Connoisseur (Literature)-12 (IQ+0) [2]; Detect Lies-15 (Per+3) [16]; Fast-Talk-12 (IQ+0) [2]; Forced Entry-13 (DX+1) [2]; Fortune-Telling (Astrology)-11 (IQ-1) [1]; Law (Dankuo Law)-14 (IQ+2) [12]; Poetry-11 (IQ-1) [1]; Shadowing-11 (IQ-1) [1]; Shortsword-12 (DX+0) [2]; Smuggling-14 (IQ+2) [8]; Streetwise-13 (IQ+1) [4]; Swimming-11 (HT+0) [1].

Using Jincheng In Other Settings

When moving Jincheng out of *Infinite Worlds,* the key concept that needs to be translated is the limited knowledge of the impending disaster. The players know about it, and so do a few others related to their characters, but no one else.

Keeping it this way this requires some motivation on the characters' part, which probably stems from the nature of the

background. In *Infinite Worlds,* it's The Secret. In fantasy settings, the knowledge will be magical in some way, so exploring the source will suggest solutions. If the revelation of impending events stems from the gods, it may be that the characters should not tell anyone else ("Sobeshu is sending the earthquake to punish the city, and only his mercy has informed the righteous so that they may be saved."). If the GM's tastes run toward classical tragedy, the characters may be cursed so that they physically cannot tell anyone due to divine injunction, or they may be literal Cassandras -- no one will believe them when they do give warning.

An interesting alternative is that those in the know could tell but don't want to. With a bit of effort Jincheng can transform into the capital of any evil empire based on Asian or Middle-Eastern-flavored oriental despotism. The adventurers could be one of a select group with prophecy or precognitive magic working in their favor, with the quake being the signal for an insurrection against the dead Emperor and his new successor.

In a science fiction setting, the magic knowledge can be brought out by Clarke's Law about sufficiently advanced technology. The characters are visitors from the advanced technical civilization of the Stellar Commonwealth, which knows from tectonic science technobabble that a disaster is looming, while Jincheng is a city on some backslid world stuck in a new dark ages. Here the restriction on telling may be a law against interference, or more prosaic concerns like knowing they'll never get their own citizens away to safety if there's general panic. In campaigns with gray morals, the adventurers may be taking advantage of their knowledge to press home a caper during the chaos -- perhaps rescuing slaves, or just out-and-out theft.

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

Pyramid Review

Dark Champions (for the [Hero System](#))

Published by [HERO Games](#)

Written by Steven S. Long

Cover by Storn Cook

Illustrated by Nate Barnes, Warren Beckford, Storn Cook, Robert Cram, Andrew Cremeans, Keith Curtis, Eric Lofgren, Roberto Marchesi, Eric Radamaker, Scott Ruggles, Dan Smith, Greg Smith, Chris Stevens, Derrick Thomas, Erich Von Haus, & Dean Yuen

372-page b&w softcover; $31.99

Just over a decade ago author Steven Long had published his first RPG sourcebook. 1993's **Dark Champions** explored the anti-heroes of the superhero genre, the vigilantes like Batman and the Punisher who fought crime on their own terms. Armed with superior skills, knowledge, and training, and often with an array of equipment and armaments they took on not the brash supervillains of the four-color genre, but the muggers, burglars, pimps, pushers, and rapists as well as organized crime in the harsh realities of the underworld. As the title suggests, this was written with the *[Champions](#)* universe in mind.

Now at the helm of Hero Games, Mr. Long is able to revisit his original work, and in doing so make it not an updated vigilante sourcebook, but a guide to gaming in the modern-day action-adventure genre in a gaming version of the real world. Thus **Dark Champions** takes in spies, cops, soldiers and mercenaries, weird conspiracies, the criminal caper, monster hunting urban fantasy, and the techno-thriller as well as vigilante crime fighting and the new addition of *Dark Champions: The Animated Series.* In this, **Dark Champions** is as much heir to **Danger International** and **Espionage** as it is to the original 1993 book. And if the discussion of those genres is not enough, then the book also tells you how to mix them up with comedy, horror, mystery, romance, and tragedy, and indeed with other **Hero System** game supplements such as *[Fantasy Hero](#)* and *[Star Hero](#)*.

Just as it starts out with the basics for the genre, **Dark Champions** does the same for characters. Before buying skills and abilities players are asked to consider their character's background, suggesting several like Intelligence Training and (reformed) Criminal, which can be combined with the given personality types (each with suggested disadvantages), genre archetypes, and the 20 or so skill packages to form a firm foundation for any character. The skill packages are neatly divided into the criminal, including a terrorist package; espionage, with a cinematic spy package that lets you do kiss-kiss-bang-bang style along with the realistic; law enforcement, and military categories. The packages are very American, so a GM will have to adapt them if he wants packages for other nationalities. Plus the selection seems a little too black and white.; split between the good and the bad and little in between, a better range is needed to fit the book's genres, particularly the monster hunting and the weird conspiracies.

In turn, attributes, skills, powers and disadvantages, and super skills are put under the **Dark Champions** spotlight, adjusting and explaining how they work in the modern adventure genre. Perks and talents get the same treatment, with perks expanded to encompass those associated with rank and position, whether business, government, or military. The new talents, such as Deadly Blow and Hotshot Pilot are mostly drawn from other **Hero System** books, but are

appropriate nevertheless. Powers are applied in several different ways, rather than in the slam-blam fashion of the four-color genre. The primary use is in the creation of weapons and equipment, but others include enhanced physical abilities and super skills for cinematic-style games. The latter might be better termed advantages in other games, and if a GM cannot find a suitable one from the 114 listed (including Favorite Gun, Cinematic Safety, and It's Somewhere In These Files), then they also serve as examples to work with.

To represent characters going through their vehicles, gear, and equipment during the course of an adventure, *Dark Champions* introduces the concept of Resource Points. Although optional, their use allows a player to buy guns, gain vehicles, and contacts without spending character points, and a GM to regulate what a player character has access to. Granted as series of pools, each differentiates between a character's personal kit and what he keeps in his armory. Admittedly this all adds another degree or two of bookkeeping to the game, but if it involves guns, gear, and cars, there are some players who are going to get a kick out of it.

Two large chapters support equipment use, the largest given over to guns. The claim that the weapons chapter is a gun bunny's dream is both true and a problem. It's true in that a lot of ammunition types and guns are listed along with accessories aplenty. A sidebar even covers fictional bullets such as the Anti-Vampire and Silver Ammunition, and all of the equipment is priced in terms of character points, resource points, and actual prices. The problem is that as comprehensive as the tables of weaponry actually are, you need to be a gun nut to know what each of the entries is. Few are illustrated and even fewer are described, resulting in the need for the non-bunny to have to refer to the list of references in the bibliography.

Actual combat in *Dark Champions* is more tightly focused and personal and is accompanied by a side note to role- as well as roll-play it. Despite the more realistic aspects of the modern adventure genre, with new options for damage, hit locations, and healing, the emphasis is still on the dramatic. This is not to say that *Dark Champions* cannot and does not handle either realistic or cinematic combat. Included realistic rules allow for blow through, grace under pressure (in a gunfight), and recoil while the cinematic allows various tricks and unlimited ammunition. One new realistic rule is for Mystery Damage, which lets a player character know that he has taken damage and some idea of its effect, but not necessarily the numbers lost.

Other support for a *Dark Champions* game comes in the form of a chapter devoted to forensics -- useful for not just the *C.S.I.*-style game -- and then another on potential adversaries. Included are organized crime, gangs, cinematic masterminds, costumed criminals, serial killers, and terrorists. The information on organized crime is decent enough and should be at least adequate for most games. A GM will need to do more research on any of the terrorist groups described if he wants to use them in any more than a superficial manner.

Used in conjunction with opening chapter on the genres of *Dark Champions,* the advice on running a *Dark Champions* game is excellent. It addresses character creation and its problems, adding paranormal abilities to a game, and also campaign type, theme, and tone. It's all sound advice, as is that on running the game, including a section on the differences between fiction and RPG play. Termed "disconnects," these are aspects that work well in the former, but make for a poor experience in the latter. For example, a player character's caution in combat versus the daring action hero, villain death versus the recurring villain, and, really, why not just send in the cavalry . . . err, marines? This is short, sweet, and very, *very* useful for almost any game.

Dark Champions is rounded out with a short rogue's gallery of vigilantes and villains. Useful as NPCs or player characters, the vigilantes are heirs apparent to the Harbinger of Justice, the very character whose creation lead the author to write the original 1993 book. The villains originally appeared in that book, but here have been updated and redone to make use of the new book's rules. For example, one makes use of the new resource points rules, while another uses Talents to become murderous with a knife. Finally, the book comes with a brief bibliography that feels a little too short and unexplained.

Physically *Dark Champions* is up to Hero Games' usual standard of presentation. It's nothing exciting to look at then, but nevertheless both readable and accessible. In updating and expanding *Dark Champions,* Steve Long takes it away from the original vigilante comic book genre and on to a broader stage that encompasses the whole of modern-set gaming. It certainly provides everything necessary to handle such a campaign, but it still leaves the GM wanting more

in each specific genre, particularly those of mercenaries, spies, and weird conspiracies. The GM will need to look at other supplements for such specifics, though Hero Games have released a source book for one of them in the form of *Dark Champions: The Animated Series.* Hopefully they will publish further supplements, perhaps one covering modern weaponry in more and better detail. Despite this problem and the lack of specifics for some genres, *Dark Champions* is everything a GM will need to turn his *Champions* campaign down a notch to run grittier, darker games.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Amazonas

Published by [Mayfair Games](#)

Designed by Stephan Dorra

Full-color boxed set with board, 48 wooden tents in four colors, 58 playing cards, 64 research tokens, 28 gold counters, 16 silver counters, four value chips, rule booklet; ; $49

Mayfair Games, purveyor of several versions of *Settlers of Catan,* has taken a somewhat loftier stance with *Amazonas.* In the Catan series you're trying to hew a living from the rough, untouched lands, but here you're just a scientific sightseer. You've been tasked to look for new and rare species of plants and animals, and you've got a reputation to maintain (and the grant money doesn't hurt either).

The object of this game -- designed for three or four players -- is to score the most points for your research by the end of the last round.

The board depicts a chunk of the Amazon River, with areas for small settlements on either side. Each site is connected to some of the others through overland trails in the jungle or passages over the water. Players get a hand of bidding cards, some traveling money, and a map of locations for their secret mission.

Each turn, an event card gets flipped over from the deck. These determine the special effect for that turn. Sometimes it's a brushfire, eating into everyone's profit. It could be an animal attack, cutting off access to neighboring villages. And it might be a chance to make extra money through your sponsors or find new specimens with the helpful natives.

Everyone bids on player order. All players get a deck that lets them bid zero to six -- the highest number goes first *and* gets that amount of silver. Going last isn't ideal because buying campsites costs more the later you arrive at the location. Once you've established a base, you can only connect to adjacent sites. Each little village is associated with one of the five bits of flora and fauna for which everyone is searching, and pitching your tent there gets you a counter of that type. This assumes there are enough spaces to accommodate you -- if there aren't, you can't camp there at all. Each player's secret mission card tells them which villages they must claim for their patron; if you're shut out of one or more of them, you lose points.

As you pick up specimens, you're trying to build a collection as wide and deep as possible. If you go wide, you want one of each of the five research counter types. The first to reach this level of diversity gets the best "value chip"; successive chips are worth progressively less. If you go deep, you have to have three or more of the same research counter to make any points off them, but you make better money, too. Playing your highest value card gets you more silver, but you have to play through your deck before you can shuffle and reuse them. Each bid card is associated with one kind of research, and you get money for matching the symbol. If you think you can pitch tents at another "flower" village or two, holding onto the flower-related bid card until then may make it your most profitable. Once the event cards run out, the game is over. Everyone counts up the points for going wide and/or deep, and the high score is hailed as the 19th century's greatest explorer.

The game components have the right materials, with a colorful mounted mapboard, good cards, thick counters, and wooden huts for your researchers to huddle in. The byways on the map seem well defined, but you have to be wary -- they can be tricky, like optical illusions for the inattentive. The real graphic trouble is the villages and their costs. There's a square for each tent it can take, and the gold nuggets in each (three silver equals one gold) tell you how much a build costs, but pawns and squares are the exact same size and…well, it's a lot happening in a tiny space, and it can

get easily shifted if you're not careful.

None of this should stop someone with the right intrepid spirit from picking up the game. (Mind you, the price might do that -- it's an awful lot of money for something that's got some fancy kit but isn't all that intricate compared to its brethren.) While it shares this general category with a number of other games, this one is a quick pickup. The rules are easy, you're not overwhelmed by the counter mix, and best of all you can play it quickly. By your second go-round you won't take an hour to finish a full game. *Amazonas* offers challenge without overload, strategy sans the needless complexity, and fun without a full evening's obligation.

--Andy Vetromile

Advantage-Based Magic for *GURPS*

by Kevin J. Chase

There is a sidebar on p. B114 that shows how Innate Attacks and Afflictions can be combined to create effects ranging from a dragon's breath to a 9mm submachinegun. But **GURPS** advantages can do much more. By combining advantages and modifiers, a GM can replace the long prerequisite chains of the standard **GURPS** skill-based magic system with a few self-contained advantages.

These spells are not limited to attacks. With nothing more than a name change, Telekinesis 10 becomes "Garret's Invisible Hand" and Invisibility becomes, well, "Invisibility." Add the right modifiers, and you can reproduce most dungeon-crawling magic.

Problems Substituting Advantages for Spells

Advantages alone don't feel like *spells* -- they feel more like super-powers. (One of the **GURPS Supers** sample characters, Necron, is a perfect example.) For starters, most advantages are always on. The whole idea of casting a spell goes out the window when a mage's augmented strength and magic force field are never off to begin with.

More importantly, one doesn't learn advantages -- one is born with them. So not only does advantage-based magic replace your beared old wizard with a bearded old superhero, but the musty old tomes in his research lab are gone too, as are the lab itself and all his apprentices -- there's nothing to learn, nothing to teach, and nothing to research.

Finally, advantages are all-or-nothing. One wizard's fireball has exactly the same range as the next's, his invisibility is no better or worse than another's, and he won't be improving his healing magic until he somehow raises his IQ.

Solutions

To keep the old wizard and his magic library in the campaign, advantage-based spells must allow:

Learning: With proper training, an apprentice who can't cast a lightning bolt should learn to do so. That training could come from a master or from a book, but it's important that he is *learning* a spell, rather than somehow having power bestowed upon him.

Training: More training should result in better control of magic. A mage who's practiced chucking fireballs all his life should find them more reliable, easier to cast, and generally more powerful than someone who just learned how.

Evolving: Training and research should improve spells not just by increasing their damage or range, but by adding new capabilities and eliminating drawbacks. With enough experimentation, a wizard should go from healing humans only to healing any humanoid, and his improved lightning bolts should home in on his foes rather than flying in a straight line.

Learning Spells

Making advantages learnable is easy on the face of it: Simply allow your players to buy spell advantages during play.

While that solves the immediate problem, it reveals another. Now your wizard's player can look forward to learning that Mind Control spell in . . . 15 or 20 weeks. After all, 50 points is a huge expenditure, and many campaigns won't last long enough for him to save that much. What the spellcaster needs is a way to buy just part of an advantage at a time.

Some advantages can already be bought piece by piece. For instance, any spell based on a leveled advantage like Innate Attack lets you pay in installments -- just buy one level at a time. Most attacks cost only a few points per die of damage, so after a year's apprenticeship a novice will throw a lightning bolt that does one die of damage, while his master dishes out six or eight at a shot.

Likewise, Afflictions can be "leveled up" by increasing the HT check penalty, and a magic force field by increasing its DR. But this still doesn't help the non-leveled advantages that are the basis for most non-combat spells.

Adventure Seed: Seeking the Master

The party's patron wizard (or the PC mage himself) wants to take his force field, lightning bolt, or telekinesis to the next level. He's already the most skilled in the kingdom, so the PCs must convince a superior master from some other nation to tutor him. Or if they're the naturally-devious sort, a covert mission to steal that other master's notes might suffice . . .

Training Spells

Closely tied to the huge up-front cost of the big spells based on Invisibility, Mind Control, and Morph is another problem: There is no sense of development over time. Immediately after paying the points, the character can cast his magic just as well as an old master. By modifying the base advantage with some hefty drawbacks, a novice spellcaster can learn an affordable (if unreliable) version of his master's favorite magic.

Costs Fatigue, Extra Time, Nuisance Effect, and Unreliable all suit a novice spellcaster well, and they also reduce the cost to an affordable level. Likewise, a few perks like Accurate, Extra Range, or Cyclic let a master wizard show his stuff. That requires some fiddling around with percentages, but like most math in *GURPS,* it's all done before play.

Even better, groups of modifiers can be wrapped up in standard packages like "apprentice" and "master" to provide a one-word adjustment to each advantage. There is a table of suggested spells and their costs at each rating of mastery at the end of this article.

Adventure Seed: Open Season on Healers

There is only one master healer in the entire kingdom. There used to be five, but the rest have died under suspicious circumstances. Someone is systematically eliminating the nation's ability not only to heal its wounded, but to train new healers. Morale among the soldiers, accustomed to magical first aid on the battlefield, is dropping fast. The heroes have to figure out who is undermining their country while simultaneously keeping the last master healer alive.

Researching Spells

Just as advantage modifiers can represent different skill levels, they can also represent variations of the spell itself. Enough of these little additions can create a whole family of magic based on improving a single spell: If a standard-issue fireball is good, then surely a fireball with an explosive area effect is better, and one that lets you choose explosive or not as you throw it is better still.

This leads to a system where wizards will seek to learn from other wizards, not to get an extra +1 skill level, but to pick up new variants of spells they already know. If you learn a teleport spell that lets you warp to places you've never been (Warp + Blind) from Lucien the Lucky, and another version that lets a friend tag along with you (Warp + Extra Carrying Capacity) from Konrad the Conveyor, then you've just invented a spell that lets you warp other people to places you've never been (Warp + Blind + Extra Carrying Capacity). Expect the world to beat a path to your door . . . if they can find you.

That old wizard and his school of magic are not only back in your campaign, but other wizards are asking to borrow

his notes.

Adventure Seed: No Place for Demons

The demon-spawn hordes of Evilopolis are about to overrun the peaceful nomads of Pastoria, and the PCs are there to save them. The nomad shamans have no trouble dealing with malevolent spirits, but they all learned their Bind and Banish spells with the limitation: "Spirits Only [-50%]". Their primitive cosmology has no place for demons, so their magic won't affect them.

While the PC knight is teaching their warriors how to fight an organized army and the rogue is learning the terrain from their scouts, the wizard should be instructing their shamans in demonology, so they can reduce their accessibility limitations to "Extra-Planar Beings". Cultural Familiarity might be the key to survival for everyone involved.

Example Spells

All spells require mana, which is a -10% Accessibility penalty simply called "Magic" below.

The other modifiers are negotiable; there's no reason a spellcaster's clothes *have* to turn invisible along with the rest of him, just as there's no reason a healer can't heal a golem. The player just has to find the character points to pay for it.

Disguise: Shapeshifting (Morph) [100] (Magic, -10%; Cosmetic, -50%; Retains Shape, -20%) [20].

Flight: Flight [40] (Magic, -10%) [36]. (See also the skills Aerobatics (p. B174) and Flight (p. B195).

Heal: Heal [30] (Magic, -10%; Xenohealing (All Earthly Life), +40%) [39].

Invisibility: Invisibility [40] (Magic, -10%; Can Carry Objects (No Encumbrance), +10%; Switchable, +10%) [40].

Mind Control: Mind Control [50] (Magic, -10%) [45].

Passwall: Permeation (Very Common Materials) [40] (Magic, -10%; Can Carry Objects (No Encumbrance), +10%) [40].

Probe Memories: Mind Probe [20] (Magic, -10%) [18].

Read Thoughts: Mind Reading [30] (Magic, -10%) [27].

Send Thoughts: Telecommunications (Telesend) [30] (Magic, -10%) [27].

True Sight: Hyperspectral Vision + See Invisible [25 + 15] (Magic, -10%; Link, +10%) [40].

Leveled Spells

Costs below are for a single level of each advantage. To figure the cost of a higher level, multiply the base cost of the advantage by the level you want, *then* add the modifiers.

Resist the temptation to multiply the final cost of a 1d Fireball by 8 to get an 8d Fireball. Due to the rounding involved, you'll usually be off by several points.

Banish: Affliction 1 [10] (Magic, -10%; Accessibility: Extra-Planar Beings, -40%; Based On Will, +20%; Disadvantage: Weakness: Natural World, 1d/minute, +60%; Malediction: -1/yd, +100%) [23].

Bind: Binding [2] (Magic, -10%; Accessibility: Extra-Planar Beings, -40%; Engulfing, +60%; Malediction: -1/yd, +100%) [5].

Evil Eye: Affliction 1 [10] (Magic, -10%; Heart Attack, Secondary, +60%; Malediction, +100%; Sense-Based, Vision, -20%) [23].

Fear Aura: Affliction 1 [10] (Magic, -10%; Disadvantage: Combat Paralysis and Cowardice (6 or less), +35%; Area Effect, 2 Yards, +50%; Emanation, -20%) [16].

Fireball: Burning Attack 1d [5] (Magic, -10%; Area Effect, 4 Yards, +100%; Variable, +5%; Dissipation, -50%) [8].

Frost Spray: Burning Attack 1d [5] (Magic, -10%; Cone, 3 Yard Width, +80%; Hazard, Freezing, +20%; Variable, +5%; Reduced Range, 1/5, -20%; No Incendiary Effect, -10%) [9].

Lightning Bolt: Burning Attack 1d [5] (Magic, -10%; Side Effect, Stunning, +50%; Surge, +20%; Variable, +5%) [9].

Movement: Telekinesis 1 [5] (Magic, -10%.) [5]

Paralyze: Affliction 1 [10] (Magic, -10%; Paralysis, +150%) [24].

Shield: Damage Resistance 8 [40] (Magic, -10%; Force Field, +20%; Physical Attacks Only, -20%) [36].

Stone Rain: Crushing Attack [5] (Magic, -10%; Area Effect, 2 Yards, +50%; Bombardment, Skill 14, -5%; Overhead, +30%; Persistent, 10 Seconds, +40%; Variable, +5%; Dissipation, -50%) [8].

Truthteller: Affliction 1 [10] (Magic, -10%; Disadvantage, Truthfulness (6 or less), +10%; Based On Will, +20%; Melee Attack, Range C, -30%) [9].

Example Skill Levels

These are collections of minor drawbacks that reduce a spell's utility for beginning casters. Journeymen and Masters more or less break even, and Grandmasters get bonuses.

Novice: Costs Fatigue (2/min), -10%; Nuisance Effect (Obvious), -5%; Takes Extra Time 2, -20%; Takes Recharge (5 sec), -10%; Unreliable (14 or less), -10%.

Apprentice: Costs Fatigue (2/min), -10%; Nuisance Effect (Obvious), -5%; Takes Extra Time 1, -10%.

Journeyman: Costs Fatigue (1/min), -5%.

Master: Costs Fatigue (1/min), -5%; Low Signature, +10%.

Grandmaster: Costs Fatigue (1/min), -5%; Delay (Variable), +10%; No Signature, +20%.

While none of these modifiers are required, think carefully before removing the fatigue requirement. Without it, magi will walk around with their Shield and True Sight spells on all the time. There's nothing wrong with that, but it makes them feel less like cast spells and more like innate powers.

To keep this list generic, modifiers that affect only missile spells are not included here. Feel free to give an old master's combat spells enhancements like Accuracy, Homing, Increased Range, and even Rapid Fire in addition to the above.

Keeping Track

Bookkeeping is easiest if a player saves character points to advance his spell advantage from one rating to the next, say from Journeyman to Master. It also makes for a more compact character sheet:

Fireball 3d (Master) [23]
Flight (Novice) [14]
Invisibility (Journeyman) [42]

But if a player is willing to keep track of all the modifiers individually, there's no reason he can't buy them one by one.

Table of Spells

Spells marked with an asterisk cost more than the math would indicate, due to the -80% limit on advantage modifiers.

Spell	Mods	Novice	Apprentice	Journeyman	Master	Grandmaster
Disguise	-80%	*20	*20	*20	25	45
Flight	-10%	14	26	34	38	46
Heal	+30%	23	32	38	41	47
Invisibility	+10%	22	34	42	46	54
Mind Control	-10%	18	33	43	48	58
Passwall	+0%	18	30	38	42	50
Probe Memories	-10%	7	13	17	19	23
Read Thoughts	-10%	11	20	26	29	35
Send Thoughts	-10%	11	20	26	29	35
True Sight	+0%	18	30	38	42	50

Table of Leveled Spells

Spell	Mods	Novice	Apprentice	Journeyman	Master	Grandmaster
Banish 1	+130%	18	21	23	24	26
Banish 2	+130%	35	41	45	47	51
Banish 3	+130%	53	62	68	71	77
Bind 3	+110%	10	12	13	13	15
Bind 6	+110%	19	23	25	26	29
Bind 9	+110%	28	34	37	39	43
Evil Eye 1	+130%	18	21	23	24	26
Evil Eye 2	+130%	35	41	45	47	51
Evil Eye 3	+130%	53	62	68	71	77
Fear Aura 1	+55%	10	13	15	16	18
Fear Aura 2	+55%	20	26	30	32	36
Fear Aura 3	+55%	30	39	45	48	54
Fireball 1	+45%	5	6	7	8	9
Fireball 2	+45%	9	12	14	15	17
Fireball 3	+45%	14	18	21	23	26
Frost Spray 1	+65%	6	7	8	9	10
Frost Spray 2	+65%	11	14	16	17	19
Frost Spray 3	+65%	17	21	24	26	29
Lightning Bolt 1	+65%	6	7	8	9	10
Lightning Bolt 2	+65%	11	14	16	17	19
Lightning Bolt 3	+65%	17	21	24	26	29
Movement 6	-10%	14	23	29	32	38
Movement 10	-10%	18	33	43	48	58
Movement 14	-10%	32	53	67	74	88
Paralyze 1	+140%	19	22	24	25	27
Paralyze 2	+140%	37	43	47	49	53
Paralyze 3	+140%	56	65	71	74	80

Name	Modifier					
Shield 2	-10%	4	7	9	10	12
Shield 4	-10%	7	13	17	19	23
Shield 8	-10%	14	26	34	38	46
Stone Rain 1	+60%	6	7	8	9	10
Stone Rain 2	+60%	11	14	16	17	19
Stone Rain 3	+60%	16	21	24	25	28
Truthteller 1	-10%	4	7	9	10	12
Truthteller 2	-10%	7	13	17	19	23
Truthteller 3	-10%	11	20	26	29	35

Appendix Z

Crash Site Recovery

For Any Conspiracy-Minded Game

by Davide Amato

Your F-16 jocks have grounded one of these pesky UFOs. Now it's time to send those expendable soldiers and recover a shiny plasma cannon. This article details what these soldiers can discover in the crash site, depending on the damage suffered by the UFO; they also provide a lingo that is usable in missions ("We have a C3 downed in Roswell . . ."). There are five categories of wreckage:

State A: Intact
State B: Nearly intact
State C1: Damaged (Crew seriously damaged)
State C2: Damaged (Crew lightly damaged but ship is a wreck)
State C3: Damaged (Power plant destroyed)
State D: Wreck

The "C" categories are roughly equivalent, representing a UFO too damaged to take off. The type of damage suffered makes the difference.

The damage suffered by the UFO can be evaluated with by someone at the scene, at a significant penalty if the observer has never evaluated UFOs before. A state-of-the-art artillery strike might be able to further damage a UFO and bring it down one state. A critical failure during the investigative or retaliatory stage destroys the crash site or gives the UFO enough time to fly away.

State A: Intact UFO

A real prize! The UFO was forced to land but damage is negligible. Fast action is required; all that's necessary for the ship's crew to do is reboot the systems or make other minor adjustments and the aliens will depart.

UFO: Nearly intact. A good scientist could even get into it and start driving.

Crew: Bad news . . . The crew is 100% intact, armed, and ready to defend the ship. All soldiers are fully armed, uninjured, and tactically deployed.

Priorities: The ship's engineer will jumpstart the engine after half an hour. The ship's captain will blow the ship if an opposing force enters it and defeats the soldiers, unless communications is jammed or ship systems are hacked.

Protocol: These are the best prizes, but usually they end blowing up with many good soldiers inside. It's not unusual for the UFO to be reduced to State C2 with a long range artillery strike before recovery!

If an assault is ordered (very unlikely) it would include the best of the best commandos escorting some excellent scientist, but it is quite difficult to deploy such a team in half an hour . . .

State B: Nearly Intact

The UFO has crashed, but damage is minor and fixable. Some grunts are injured but all the officers are well.

UFO: Damaged. Some damage overcame the ship's armor and one vital component is not working. The cargo is slightly ruined, and some fragile components are dead.

Crew: There have been some casualties amongst the grunts (about 10%). Soldiers are fully armed, uninjured, and tactically deployed, but with reduced number and morale.

Priorities: If an engineer (either alien or human) makes an appropriate skill roll, the ship will fly again, albeit damaged. The ship's captain is still likely to blow the ship.

Protocol: For humanity, this isn't as suicidally risky as the State A, but still too risky for recovery. At least there is enough time to bombard it from afar!

State C1: Damaged (Crew Seriously Damaged)

The UFO has crashed bad, killing and injuring many of its crew but not destroying the ship. This is the standard state for UFOs downed by biological weapons, psionic strikes, or other crew-killing devices.

UFO: Typically, this type of vessel has been seriously damaged. Half of the armor plating has been blown off, half of the vital systems are scrap metal, and all fragile components are dead. The UFO is usually embedded in the ground, many corridors are strewn with rubble, and the lighting is poor. Interior walls are holed, sirens howls, and bodies are aplenty. Half of cargo destroyed. A cloud of smoke will surround the UFO, blocking line of sight.

Crew: There are typically 75% casualties, and the remaining crew will be wounded and with low morale. Even noncombatants aboard the ship will take arms in the desperate defense of their lives.

Priorities: Somebody aboard the ship will radio a S.O.S., if possible, and the crew will just try to stay alive until help arrives. A friendly UFO can land to save the survivors or strafe the wreckage until nothing remains.

Protocol: This is a "standard" recovery mission. It's not too risky and has a decent reward. The team just needs to make sure it can pull the mission off in time!

State C2: Damaged (Crew Lightly Damaged But Ship Is A Wreck)

The UFO has crashed bad, but ultra-tech-safety systems have kept the crew alive. This is the standard state for UFOs damaged by standard combat or artillery strikes while landed.

UFO: It's almost destroyed, and all systems are dead. The UFO is embedded in the ground, with no lighting nor interior walls. The cargo has been totally destroyed, although some random component can be salvaged. A thick cloud of smoke will surround the UFO and soar high into the sky.

Crew: 40% casualties, and the remaining crew will be with low morale and few weapons, armor, and equipment. Everyone will grab a makeshift weapon and fight.

Priorities: As for C1.

Protocol: Another standard recovery mission, especially for capturing live aliens. Some of them can be pretty dangerous even while unarmed.

State C3: Damaged (Power Plant Destroyed)

Typically in this situation, the UFO landed to restart its power plant, but it blew up! This is the standard state for UFOs downed by sabotage or engine killing weapons.

UFO: This UFO will never move again. The entire power plant failed catastrophically and it is now scrap metal. It has no internal power or lighting, with all systems shut down or in emergency power. The cargo is half-destroyed.

Some other components are damaged but serviceable, and could be scavenged easily. The entire area is contaminated by radioactive fuels and toxic coolants.

Crew: Usually all engineers and technicians aboard the ship have been deep fried. A third of the crew is dead, and the survivors will suffer from low morale, wounds, and poisoning.

Priorities: As for C1, but there is a slim chance of rescue. If there are any fellow UFOs in the area, they are likely to just strafe it from far away.

Protocol: This usually isn't worth the risk. Sending a team in a compromised battlefield just to recover a wreck is not a good choice. A team would have to include a combat expert with good skill and equipment.

State D: Wreck

The UFO has crashed very bad, with few survivors.

UFO: A total wreck. There's no usable component, just a pile of metallic junk strewn over a wide area. Area may be contaminated with radioactive or poisonous materials.

Crew: There are less than 10% survivors, all severely wounded and with no equipment. Some of the ship's soldiers will go berserk, while many other will be slowly dying from wounds.

Priorities: As for C1, but help is unlikely to arrive.

Protocol: This is a good mission for a group of rookie investigators, but usually it's not worth the risk. A medic with some knowledge of alien biology (or luck) can stabilize a dying alien and take him alive.

Things I Love As A GM

[Last week's](#) column generated some interesting buzz in my inbox, and so I thought I'd dip back into the well for a second week, this time listing off some random things I love out of a game as as GM. Again, this isn't a definitive list, but rather just some things that sprang to mind.

* * *

A Good Index. One of the things that first attracted me to *GURPS* was that crazy *Wild Cards* cover; I didn't know what *GURPS* or even *Wild Cards* was, but if an obviously supers RPG setting could look that cool, how bad could either be?

But that's a digression. The *second* thing that attracted me to *GURPS* was realizing that it was actually indexed . . . not just the core books, but even the supplements.

Alas, though *GURPS* was one of the earliest RPGs I discovered in my fledgling branching out from non-TSR games, I was saddened to learn that the other games I branched out into didn't have them either. (Of course, neither did most TSR games. Stoopid *Adventures of Indiana Jones.* Stoopid *Marvel Super-Heroes.*)

Now, my love of indices might end if and when the electronic book ever comes fully into its own. For example, when I'm searching PDFs, I love the feature that does a global search for a phrase, and offers some context words around that search. But until then, I'd gladly give up the 2-5% of a book's page count that is required for a good index.

* * *

Game Worlds That Separate Information Everyone Knows From Information Only the GM Knows. I think the first game I encountered that did this amazingly well was the *Deadlands* line, which were each divided into sections of general player knowledge ("Posse Territory"), intermediate secrets ("No Man's Land"), and GM-only information ("The Marshal's Handbook"). Since so much of a good horror game is not knowing exactly what's possible (or even exactly what's going on), this technique made it very easy to keep sensitive material from the information while still allowing them to read the sourcebooks and understand the setting.

Unfortunately, too many games reveal too much. This either forces the GM to be a screen for every sourcebook ("Don't read the left half of page 2, the middle of page 7, the first six paragraphs on page 9..."), potentially spoils a lot of fun for players by requiring them to place a barrier between player and character knowledge, or requires the GM to make up enough interesting "new" stuff to keep the campaign from being entirely known before the first die is thrown. (I suspect, for *Dungeons & Dragons/d20 System,* this is one of the reasons why monsters are such perpetual favorites for magazine articles and books; since so much of that game is known to its players, one of the only ways to interject surprise into the game is the introduction of new critters.)

Anyway, good games are like toolboxes, and good tools allow me to customize their usage according to my need. As another curious example, I once ran a game of White Wolf's *Aberrant;* now, one of the curious aspects of this setting is that the opening storyline of the game was a murder mystery of a character beloved by the game world. And so, this was a really juicy whodunnit. Unfortunately, the problems were two-fold. First, I wanted to set the campaign a month or two *before* the murder; I thought it would give the demise a lot more impact if I could have the PCs team up with that character first. So I didn't want the players to know about the murder ahead of time.

[ABERRANT SPOILER ALERT!]

The second problem was that the mystery is built up as a phenomenal enigma, but the most likely possibility they offered within the main book turned out to be exactly correct. It's like a surreal trailer for a bad thriller movie: "You won't know what to believe when everything is *exactly* as it seems . . ."

*[END **ABERRANT** SPOILER ALERT]*

Fortunately, both of these problems were easily solved by the book itself. As I've mentioned [before,](#) **Aberrant** presents almost all of its background and setting information in the form of in-game material: website articles, television broadcasts, and so on. As a result, it was trivial to excise the material I didn't want them to see; all the information relating to the murder, for example, was revealed in just a few pages. And then, once the murder *did* happen, I was able to show the information from those pages as a new in-game handout. Boss!

* * *

Games with some kind of player-enabled "fate points." Whether it's called Karma Points, Fate Points, Character Points, Possibilities, or the like, I always love games that give the players more control over their fates, since it means I don't need to work as hard to achieve balance. (As I revealed [last week,](#) making up characters or full-fledged encounters isn't one of my strong suits as a GM . . . of course, neither is actually doing any work.) One of the great things about these points is that players use them to create their *own* balance. After all, if an adventure is too easy, they won't use the points at all. If it's just right, they'll use points to ensure they win. And if it's too hard, they'll use points to *survive.* And the beauty is that this balance is entirely in the hands of the players; as one player put it, "If you die with [game-affecting points], you're stupid."

In addition, when I'm learning a system, I can be generous or stingy with the points depending on how many they used that session, allowing me to further tweak the difficulty level of the campaign. It's a win-win!

More interestingly, some games allow these points to modify the setting; the example from *DC Heroes* is a fight in a lab, where the hero wants to reach out for a handy beaker of acid to throw at his attacker. In my experience, players are generally reluctant to use this ability, but done right it can allow for a lot more of the cinematic give-and-take seen in most media. And it also makes it a more collaborative effort.

* * *

Speaking of collaborative efforts, feel free to offer up your own ideas for things you love as a GM over on the [message boards](#) or by [e-mail](#). Because everyone deserves to know about happiness.

--Steven Marsh

The Library of Libraries

by Conan W. Purves

At the end of every world, its hidden access known only to a few, is the Library. It is the ultimate reference institution. It contains all recorded information from every world, every time, every dimension -- an incalculable treasure for the researcher, indeed. The only trouble is getting there, finding what you are looking for, and getting a library card.

Location

Every world, be it a land, a time, or a galaxy (in other words, basically any game setting) has a single access to the Library. Though the entrance is extremely well-hidden, difficult, and dangerous to reach, it is always in the material form of the species it serves. Oxygen-breathing, standard-gravity creatures will find that the portal has the air and pressure they are used to. Water-based life forms will be able to swim to the Library. Currently, on our planet and timeline, the entrance is rumored to be buried somewhere in the Arctic Circle; those few who know its exact location are extremely worried about global warming.

The Lobby

Once the entrance has been discovered and passed through, a visitor to the Library will discover himself in a vast circle, divided in half by the Welcome Desk. This is the Lobby. Behind them is a curved wall with an infinite number of portals, each leading to a different world, dimension, or timeline. Through these doorways come and go every possible being from every possible location and time: white-robed and bearded Greek philosophers, tribal shaman, greys, fire demons, financial analysts, leopardmen, etc. Visitors, though from diverse worlds, do tend to represent the studying classes of their respective societies. There are many reasons to come to the Library, and more than a few have tried (and failed) to take it for its wealth.

The Lobby, as a crossroads and the only part of the Library where any kind of discussion is allowed, is a meeting place for many. However, interaction between strangers is frowned upon. Unless one has a specific appointment or is following up on a posting on the Bulletin Board, most people direct themselves briskly to their business at hand. This reticence toward social interaction is a fundamental part of the culture here and is founded on a general ignorance of what the consequences would be if two individuals from disparate worlds were to communicate. Nobody knows what would happen and nobody wants to find out.

However, there are some who ignore these concerns and make their living hanging around the Lobby, selling maps, information, reference materials, and prayers for guidance to the visitors. Most of these individuals are hucksters and con artists, though there may be a few who actually have something useful to sell. There are also some pilgrims who consider the Library or something in the Library to be a central element in their religion. These types are generally discouraged from entering the internal rooms after the Librarians have ascertained their purpose and thus remain in the Lobby, either pleading their case or holding prayer vigils.

Opposite the wall of portals, on the other side of the open space, is the Welcome Desk. It is a long wooden barrier that divides the circle of the Lobby in half. One can pass to either side of it and access the entrances to the various sections in the back wall of the Lobby. Behind the Welcome desk, any kind of communication, verbal, visual or psychic -- unless it is a request to a Librarian -- is impossible. It is unknown if it is magic, technology, or some other force that prevents communication, but so far nobody has been able to bypass it. Though these restrictions may seem overly severe to a human being, the passage of thoughts or sign language are just as disturbing to certain other species as someone yelling out loud.

The Librarians working the Welcome Desk are very friendly but not very informative. They will indicate the appropriate section and help one get a library card, but they are in constant demand and cannot spend more than a

minute or so with each client before they have to move on to the next. They will direct the visitor to the appropriate section, pointing to the doors behind them. If asked for any more detailed information, such as the specific location of a volume, they will refer the visitor to a Librarian in that section.

The Welcome Desk opens up in a semi-circle kiosk that is the Security Booth. The bored-looking individuals that work here manage the Lost & Found and any threats to the Library or to peace and good manners in the Lobby itself. Otherwise, they are not very helpful.

Past the Welcome Desk, the other side of the circle houses entrances to the various wings of the Library. These doorways change from time to time, depending on the intellectual trend of the time and the whims of the Library's Board of Directors. Currently, there are only four wings: The Tower of Story, The Dismal Science, The Thought Bubble, and How Things Work. Each of these sections is divided into many sub-sections whose organization is open to the GM.

Inside The Library

Once a visitor has passed through a portal into one of the four sections, he is on his own. There are a bewildering number of choices with very little guidance. Because the question of language is so complex, signs and printed directions are very limited. However, as one probes deeper, and enters rooms with documents constrained to a specific subject, culture, or world, one finds the organization and labelling improves. Librarians have bailiwicks and their control over them is almost absolute. Each section has a unique organization system, usually linked to the subject matter of the section.

The interior of the Library can be quite dangerous. Though any kind of attack is forbidden (even the intention of attack will bring security to the scene immediately), the manifold environments themselves pose a threat. Though most sections of uncommon atmosphere post warnings, death by drowning, burning, rapid pressure change, or the like occurs often enough to keep the custodial staff quite busy. A more common danger is just getting lost. Some of the documents themselves can be hazardous as well. At times it is almost impossible to get to the far end of the Elder Gods section because the floor is so cluttered with gibbering madmen, writhing in the fetal position. There are spellbooks that burn, data disks that wipe minds, and tomes that simply eat people. It is strongly recommended that the visitor of the Library know what they are looking for and go directly to it.

The Tower Of Story

This section deals entirely with fictional accounts. It is believed to be in the form of an infinitely high and low cylinder, though nobody has ever measured it from the inside or seen the outside. Generally, the lower one goes, the more "primitive" the documents become. The bottom floors contain rooms of storytellers. Slightly above them are cave paintings, walls of hieroglyphs, crop circles, the Nazca lines, and other pictographic forms (though, interestingly, comic books can be found much higher up). The middle sections are made up of books. Some of these rooms are dangerously seductive and should not be entered without the appropriate magical or technological protections. The Romance room is famous for its soft divans, endless boxes of chocolates, and opiatic stories that never let go once they have the weak-willed in their clutches.

The higher levels of the tower are dedicated to stories in media other than print. DVDs, holographs, virtual reality disks, and other incomprehensible means of presenting narrative contain the stories of infinite cultures. One long-running and bitter feud among the Librarians is whether or not the roleplaying games should be kept in the Tower of Story or elsewhere.

The Dismal Science

Given money's current vogue in the universe, the Board decided to dedicate an entire section to it and the people who worry about it. This wing is extremely boring, sometimes fatally so. Only those who know what they are doing should enter here. It is in the form of a gigantic rectangular room with linoleum floors and steel-gray shelves.

The Thought Bubble

This wing is dedicated to intellectual and academic pursuits. Documents concerning all the social sciences from every world can be found here. The first room through the portal is a giant glass sphere (thus, bubble), the floor of which is lined with massive tables of dark wood. One can borrow periodicals here (subject to the temporal restrictions noted below) and read them at the tables. The outside of the bubble is constantly changing. It may be a starry night, an argon sky, a jungle, flowing lava, patterns of fractals, and so on. Ringing the base of the sphere are passages leading to the myriad sub-sections of the Thought Bubble. There is an extensive language and linguistics section here as well, with a translation center where a visitor can hire "memory-runners." These are couriers who will follow the visitor to a given document, memorize it, and return to the translation center where they will communicate it to the translators.

How Things Work

This is considered the "practical" wing of the Library and looked down upon by some of the more academic-minded Librarians. The materials for research of any kind, as long as it has some sort of application, can be found here. Mechanical drawings, lists of spell components, FTL drive theories, woodworking books, and software training CD-ROMs are all available here.

This is one of the most difficult wings to navigate. It is basically a labyrinth. Fortunately, the Librarians here tend to be the most helpful (although many note that "most helpful Librarian" is faint praise indeed).

Policies

Egress

A visitor can only exit through the portal they entered.

Access

A visitor has access to every section of the Library with one exception: They cannot enter rooms whose documents came into existence during the visitor's future, unless the visitor has already traveled to that future. Access can be taken away at any Librarian's discretion at any time.

Rules

No communication of any kind is allowed behind the Welcome Desk, unless it is with a Librarian. It is almost impossible to break this rule thanks to the powerful force that keeps the whole place silent, though some high-level wizards and ultra-tech individuals have been able to get around it. Eye contact is possible, but frowned upon. Staring will bring security running.

Destruction of material or visitors is also expressly forbidden. Individuals should be conscious of their physical form and its effects on their surroundings at all times. This holds particularly true for fire and water-based creatures (there are, of course, sections in flame and underwater).

Borrowing Books

Though the Library is primarily a reference library, it does have a lending policy. Visitors with a valid and current library card may borrow a document with the two following restrictions:

- the document must exist in the visitor's home world
- the document cannot be unique

So in our world you could find and borrow yesterday's newspaper but not tomorrow's; the text of the Declaration of Independence but not the original; a map of Thikombia Island in Fiji but not Captain Tasman's map to the location of the golden skeleton his first mate buried there in 1643. All of the items you can't borrow are available for reference, of course . . . if you can find them.

The amount of time documents can be borrowed is relative to the time-scale of the visitor's world. Generally speaking it is three weeks.

Getting A Library Card

The Library has significant experience in dealing with theft, fraud, and false identity, and therefore has an extremely rigorous and restrictive set of requirements to get a library card. Though the "Proof of Existence" requirement has now been waived (some of the more conservative Board members are pushing for it to be reinstated), the "Proof of Identity" and "Proof of Residency" requirements are almost as burdensome. You must prove you are who you say you are and you must prove that you have a fixed address. Itinerant adventurers need not apply. Proof of identity can be as simple as a valid birth certificate or as complex as DNA samples going back four generations, each with signed, stamped, notarized, and holographed legal documents testifying to their validity. One poor soul had to bring his hypnotized parents and elementary school teacher to verbally confirm his identity.

Proof of Residency is often more onerous. The Library frowns upon uncommon existences and requires a deed of property or lease, two separate sets of bills with the address printed on them from a legitimate public utility or financial institution (the Library decides what constitutes "legitimate"), and hand-written personal correspondence, also with the address, with some details that can prove that the correspondent actually knows the applicant. A spaceship can count as a permanent residence.

The application process can be one of great frustration and there are some who come and hang out at the desk just to watch the many and entertaining forms of outburst and temper displayed by unsuccessful applicants.

Overdue Books

The penalty for delinquent borrowers is, in the following order, a fine, three written requests for return of the item, three verbal requests for payment of the fine and return of the item, and finally a personal visit from a Book Collector. If all that fails, the Library will send out their in-house Collector, usually a senior Librarian.

The Fine Structure

The fine begins modestly enough, but can grow to vast proportions. In modern, *GURPS* terms, the fine is $1 a week for the first 10 weeks, at which point the delinquent borrower will receive a written warning. The fine then grows to $2 a week for the next 10 weeks and the second written warning is sent. This process continues through 60 weeks, at which point the borrower owes the library $210 and will have received three written warnings and three verbal warnings (by whatever means of mass-distance communcation is common -- or, barring that, possible -- in the borrower's world: telephone, videophone, hologram, Whisper spell, oracle, or the like).

The Library's board considers this an appropriately generous policy, taking into consideration its public role and the varying income levels of its clientele. It is at this point that the fine is frozen and the Collectors are sent out. If the first Collector fails in his mission (and failure is rather loosely defined by the Library) and has to be replaced, the fine starts to grow again, starting again at the rate of $1 every 10 weeks, but now doubling at the beginning of each 10-week cycle. The exponential fine rate, though it has its detractors on the Board, exists as a preventive measure rather than a mechanism for gathering revenue. Still, empires have been ruined because of an overdue library book and there are individuals on the run today, barely one step ahead of the Library.

What happens if a book is lost, stolen, damaged, or destroyed while in a borrower's possession is likewise something of a mystery. All the usual penalties that apply to "late" books -- fines, warnings, etc. -- are still the same. However

many of those who told a Book Collector they longer had a book were "encouraged" by them to try more diligently to find it. Those informing a Librarian of the same event were usually last seen being escorted by the Librarian . . . presumably back to the Library, but never to be seen again. Regardless, about the only option a patron has for handling a missing or destroyed book is to try recovering it, or acquiring another copy of that volume. (A damaged copy -- either the original volume or a lesser-conditioned version of the same volume -- will usually be accepted, presuming all the information is still intact.)

The Book Collectors

The Book Collectors are an outside contract service hired by the Library to retrieve overdue books and the fines associated with them. It is an easy job to get, if you know the right people. There are several agencies that provide collectors for the Library and many freelance collectors as well. Like most contract jobs, there are benefits and drawbacks to either working under an agency or working freelance. Most collectors prefer the security of a good agency, especially the ones that provide backup on difficult jobs. The Library shares all of the delinquent borrower's personal information with the collectors, so they usually come prepared.

The Librarians

Little is known about the Librarians. Their ranks are not limited to any specific species and there are only rumors as to the Library's hiring practice. It is suspected that the Librarians exist in a rigid and complex hierarchy, made dynamic by internal politicking. Whatever their background, many believe them to be incredibly powerful creatures. This reputation is primarily based on accounts of Senior Librarians' overdue book missions, missions that currently have a 100% success rate. (The little old lady with the black clutch purse and horn-rimmed glasses stood at the massive stone doors of Deathsmoor Castle and spoke to the guard: "Excuse me, I'm hear to see General Gralkstooth about an overdue book . . .") Their only distinguishing element is that all Librarians wear or carry a pair of horn-rimmed glasses on a chain, whether or not they have eyes. Some suspect that these glasses may actually be very powerful items in and of themselves. Some say that they can read your mind, others that they shoot death rays, still others that they give the wearer immediate visual access to the Library's entire contents. Even as a trophy, they would be considered of immense value.

Librarians vary in personality and temperament. They are all professional and unbending in their loyalty to the Library and its rules. However, some may be brusque and unhelpful, while others may be exceedingly friendly, leading a user directly to the document requested, all the while having a rich conversation on its contents. A regular visitor may make an acquaintance with a Librarian (though never a friend), while some may never see the same Librarian twice. The hucksters in the Lobby will be glad to sell a new visitor information that leads to the location of a helpful Librarian. Some visitors come equipped with specific prayers for this result as well.

The Library In The Campaign

The Library has been designed as a modular component for any campaign that is comfortable not being too tied to "reality." Its use can range from a quick side trip, to a complete adventure, to an epic journey spanning several sessions. It can also be used repeatedly, as a regular resource for a party, with new obstacles each time. Access to information can be incredibly powerful, with the potential to unbalance the campaign. The Library is a vast resource, but its rewards should be complemented by appropriate challenges. Getting a library card, finding the right document, and surviving the internal rooms of the Library are all structured so that the GM can scale their difficulties depending on the value of the document in question and the power levels of the campaign.

If party members actually borrow a book, getting the book back (or trying not to give it back, as the case may be) can be an adventure in and of itself. A specific document could be necessary for the completion of a quest, but the quest takes just slightly longer than the point where the Library sends out the Collectors, so the party is caught between completing their quest and staying one step ahead of the Library.

As A Campaign

An entire campaign can take place within the Library. Characters could play junior Librarians, struggling to work their way up the Byzantine hierarchy of the Library, though the details of such a campaign would be up to the GM. Players could play Collectors, perhaps all working for the same agency. A Collector game is open to all kinds of world-jumping adventure, as overdue books could be found anywhere and may require a rich combination of stealth, intrigue and force to retrieve.

Demonic Rituals for *Unknown Armies*

by Bevan Thomas

The figure crouched in the pentagram, preparing his offerings of pornography, money, fried chicken, and pillows. As the sun set, he lay down and spread his limbs, yelling out, "I call to thee, spirits from beyond the Veil!" Then the figure began to shake, as if victim of some strange fit. When the shaking ended, his eyes appeared brighter and more energetic, and his face was likewise transformed in style. He laughed with a feeling of pure, crazed joy, and reached towards one of the offerings. "I really missed chicken," said the figure as he picked up a drumstick and bit.

Demons and revenants are some of the most prominent unnatural beings in *Unknown Armies,* spirits of the dead that have been pulled back to the world of the flesh by mortal magick or the power of their own obsessions. Though these unnatural beings are often an excellent source for information, they are also usually lying, selfish bastards who are obsessed with recovered their lost sensations, and anyone who deals with demons does so at his own peril.

Though certain magick schools such as Dipsomancy and Entropomancy -- as well as the occasional avatar (for example, the Merchant) -- incorporate the summoning and binding of demons, most adepts and avatars prefer to keep the demonic world at arm's length. Through their seductive pacts, demons often lead their associates into taboo-breaking (not to mention amoral) situations, and there is always the worry that too much interaction with the dearly departed will attract the attention of the enigmatic Cruel Ones (a force that no adept is ready to deal with).

However, Thaumaturges generally lack the luxury of avatars and adepts to dismiss demonic assistance out of hand. Rituals are few and far between, and their uses are usually very specific. Frankly, there is only so much unnatural stuff a proud possessor of Back Money, Plague of Hiccups, and Angel of the Animals can pull off. If he doesn't want to mess with his opponents or watch for any magick placed upon him, then he has to rely on natural means to get things done. However, demons are often useful sources of information on the occult, can serve as astral spies, and may have other useful skills or abilities. With regards to demons, one simple ritual can open the door to a lot of possibilities (and a lot of danger, but many Thaumaturges don't really understand this until it is much too late). Furthermore, rituals that summon demons are much more common than most other rituals, because demons actively spread them around to increase the demons' potential access to the physical plane. This means that many of the rituals that Thaumaturges are likely to find are demonic summonings. Conversely, rituals that banish or bind demons are very rare, since demons do their best to destroy or distort them (demons enjoy people using distorted binding rituals, since it makes the Thaumaturges believe that they have far more control over the demons than they actually do).

Thaumaturges that involve themselves a lot with demons are commonly known as diabolists. Diabolists are an eccentric and idiosyncratic group even by occult underground standards. Though not bound by taboos, they are often directed by the whims and needs of their demons and need to fulfill all sorts of bizarre pacts unless the diabolists have the good fortune of knowing the Command Demon ritual. They often spend a lot of their time reading the obituaries and investigating graveyards, getting information on potential demons. Particularly ambitious and amoral diabolists will sometimes have people killed in particularly traumatic ways in the hopes of transforming them into demons. Naturally, the diabolist in question will do his best to make the demon unaware that he was involved in its demise, as demons are generally unwilling to help their killers. The more magickally experienced a diabolist becomes, the more demons and the less humans he generally associates with. Particularly potent diabolists are often isolated from normal human contact, feeling a stronger connection to the dead than the living. Because they focus so much on obsessive, driven demonic personalities, they become unused to the subtleties of human interaction, and often become blunt and insensitive as a result.

Occasionally people are able to conjure demons without resorting to rituals, spells, or anything else that extravagant,

instead using special Soul skills. An example of this is Rebecca DeGhoule and her Summon Demons & Send 'Em Away skill from the *Unknown Armies* core rulebook. These individuals have often developed these skills through contact with demons or pure focus of their will. The skill will often duplicate a demonic ritual, its advantage being that the skill does not require charges nor time. However, the skill is less versatile than a magick school or even Authentic Thaumaturgy would be. Those who rely on a special skill to summon demons are often disdained by the ritual diabolists for lacking intellectual rigor and a true understanding of the Statosphere, and are often called "hobbyists" or "hedge conjurers" by those who are unnaturally "in the know."

The following rituals are a sample of various demonic rituals that can be included in a campaign. It is suggested that the Game Master customize them for his campaign to help keep the players guessing. Particularly in the case of summoning rituals, it is likely that there are many different kinds in existence with their own particular ritual actions.

Attract Demons

Power: minor
Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: Attracts all demons within a five-mile radius to the skull and they must remain within five feet of it for one hour. If the skull moves, the demons must follow it. Though the demons must follow the skull, they are not restricted in any way from affecting the person holding it, or even killing him.
Ritual Action: Dig up the skull of a woman who died while pregnant and cover it with honey. Hold the skull towards the setting sun while making the sound of a whippoorwill. After the spell ends, the skull becomes worthless for this ritual, and a new skull would need to be found if the ritual was going to be repeated.

Banish Demon

Power: significant
Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: Sends a demon or revenant back to whatever passes for the afterlife, unable to return for six months. Some spirits give up their rebellious ways, and decide to pass on, but most are even hungrier to return and gain vengeance on whoever banished them.
Ritual Action: Collect a decent amount of material from the place that the demon's body is (so a handful of its grave-dirt if it was buried, or a some water if it was dropped into the ocean). Toss the material into the spirit's face while calling out, "You are dead and no longer welcome on this world! Go back into the eternal night!"

Command Demon

Power: significant
Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: You can control a summoned demon.
Ritual Action: Grow a tree, constantly watering it with your own semen (or menstrual blood) and urine. When it has become old enough to grow strong branches, cut off a branch that's at least one foot long and sharpen the end to a point. With the point, prick your left index finger enough to draw blood. This branch is now able to be used as a "command wand." It can be used as many times for this ritual as desired (and can even be used by other people), though if it is broken then it becomes permanently useless and a new one must be fashioned.

When performing this ritual, point the command wand at the demon and call out "By my will and by this wand, obey!"

Determine Demon

Power: minor
Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: Reveals if a dead person has become a demon, revenant, or simply passed to his or her final reward.
Ritual Action: Cut up a photograph or picture of your target and drop the remains into a glass of milk. Drink the milk

and all the pieces of the picture.

Exorcism

Power: minor
Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: Forces an unnatural being to disconnect itself from its victim. Examples include ending a demonic possession, removing an entropic, or unlatching an astral parasite. The unnatural being is able to directly affect its former victim for 24 hours.
Ritual Action: Tie the victim's hands and feet together with thin rope and place them within a circle drawn with chalk. Splash the victim with water from a mountain spring and then whip him for thirty-three minutes and three seconds while demanding that the spirit leave the body. The spirit's nature must be named (such as "be gone, demon," or "be gone, astral parasite").

Summon Random Demon

Power: minor
Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: Summons a random demon that speaks to you telepathically. This ritual does not grant you any special control over the demon.
Ritual Action: On the second Sunday of the month, draw a pentagram on the ground in white chalk without the chalk ever leaving the ground or the line being broken. Then at four of the five points, place a symbol that represents a pleasure of the flesh (which demons long so much to experience). Place a sexual image (such as a pornographic magazine) on the bottom left point to symbolize lust, a large amount of money (such as a $100 bill) on the right for avarice, an incredibly unhealthy yet enjoyable piece of food (like a greasy hamburger with all the trimmings) on the top left point for gluttony, and a pillow on the top right for sloth.

After all the preparations are complete, walk counter-clockwise around the pentagram three times and spit on all four the objects placed with it. Then lie down inside the pentagram so that each limp is at a point, and touching the relevant object and your head is at the pentagram's highest point. The moment the sun sets, say "I call to thee, spirit from beyond the Veil."

Summon Specific Demon

Power: minor
Cost: 5 minor charges
Effect: Summons a specific demon that speaks to you telepathically. Many of the dead have gone on to whatever final reward awaits them, and have not become demons. Any attempt to summon one of these people automatically fails. This ritual does not grant you any special control over the demon.
Ritual Action: On the desired demon's birthday, draw a pentagram on the ground of a place where the person slept at least three times in life. The pentagram must be drawn in white chalk with the chalk ever leaving the ground or the line being broken. Then at four of the five points, place a symbol that represents something precious to the person in question (examples include photographs of loved ones, favorite book, treasured mementos, etc.). At the minute corresponding to when the person was born, burn a picture or photograph of him and eat the ashes. Then lie in the pentagram with your limbs and head each at the appropriate point and call out the desired demon's name three times.

Ward Against Demons

Power: minor
Cost: 3 minor charges
Effect: No demons or revenants can cross the circle for 333 minutes, even while possessing someone else. Therefore if they are inside the circle, they cannot get out and if they are outside the circle, they cannot get in.
Ritual Action: Mix the flesh from a three-day old corpse with 33 drops of your own blood and the juice from

overripe green grapes. Use a brush with bristles made from a dead donkey to paint the circle with the mixture.

Take Me To Your Leader

for *GURPS*

by Stephen Dedman

"Some men are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them."
--Clown, *Twelfth Night*

Dennis: "What I object to is, you automatically treat me as an inferior."
Arthur: "Well, I am King."
--*Monty Python and the Holy Grail*

With the possible exception of Monty Python's anarcho-syndicalist commune, every human society known has had some form of hierarchy. Methods of reaching the top of the heap have varied from time to time and place to place, but in any campaign, there will be someone with higher status than the PCs -- and the power to make their lives easier, more difficult, or considerably shorter.

Here is a collection of high-status NPCs designed for use as contacts, enemies, allies, and patrons. Wise or foolish, benign or malevolent, all-powerful or ineffectual, all have one thing in common -- they are the most important individual in their community. They are designed with a particular cultural background in mind, but require only minor changes to adapt for almost any setting from the Paleolithic to the post-apocalyptic.

Judge Roy Bean, "The Law West of the Pecos"   *86 points*

Ht 5'8", Wt 290 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 60.

Appearance: Fat and unkempt, with gray hair and untidy beard. Wears shirt and unbuttoned vest (both stained), frayed straw hat or bandana, golden watch chain.

Languages: English (Native). TL: 5. Cultural Familiarity: Homeline.

Attributes: ST 11 [10]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 9 [-10]. [20 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24; HP 11 [0]; Will 13 [10]; Per 11 [0]; FP 9 [0]; Basic Speed 4.75 [0]; Basic Move 4 [0]. [10 points]

Advantages and Perks: Allies (Regular customers, Present on 15-, group of 6-10, 50% point total) [36], Charisma/2 [10], Status +3 [10; +1 Status free with Wealth], Wealth (Wealthy) [20] [76 points]

Disadvantages and Quirks: Alcoholism [-15], Bloodlust (15) [-5], Congenial [-1], Fat [-3], Greed (9) [-22], Intolerance, Total [-10], Proud [-1], Unattractive [-4]. [-61 points]

Skills: Acting (A) IQ [2]-11; Brawling (E) DX [2]-11; Carousing (E) HT+2 [4]-11; Fast-Talk (A) IQ+2 [8]-13; Filch (A) DX [2]-10; Guns/TL5 (Pistol) (E) DX [2]-11; Intimidation (A) Will [2]-13; Law (Texas) (H) IQ-2 [1]-9; Leadership (A) IQ+1 [1]-12 *; Leatherworking (E) DX [1]-10; Merchant (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Politics (A) IQ [2]-11; Professional Skill (Barber) (A) IQ-1 [1]-10, (Bartender)(A) IQ [2]-11; Public Speaking (A) IQ+2 [2]-13 *; Riding (Horse) (A) DX-1 [1]-9; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-11; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-11; Streetwise (A) IQ [2]-11. [39 points]

* +2 for Charisma

Gear: Revolver, .36.

Roy Bean (1825-1903) fought on the Confederate side during the Civil War as leader of the New Mexico Territory's Free Rovers, a guerilla group better known to locals as the Forty Thieves. In 1882, he was appointed Justice of the Peace for Pecos County, Texas, after posting a thousand-dollar bond: he held onto that position for 14 years by using his isolated saloon as a polling place, until authorities noted he was receiving more votes than there were eligible voters. His knowledge of the law was gleaned from a copy of the 1879 Revised Statutes of Texas; he used other law books sent to him as firelighters or toilet paper. A sign on Bean's saloon in Langtry, The Jersey Lilly, boasted that he was the "Law West of the Pecos," which made him the highest authority for 400 miles around.

Bean mostly held court sitting on a beer barrel outside his saloon, with his regular customers serving as jury and sometimes as executioners. He used his power primarily to make money, fleecing both defendants and accusers, and fining travelers who complained of being overcharged or short-changed for disturbing the peace. He received $5 for officiating at inquests, $2 for marriages, and $5 for (illegally) granting divorces. Called to investigate a man who fell from a nearby railroad bridge, he discovered $40 and a six-shooter in the corpse's pocket, and fined the dead man $40 for wrongfully carrying a concealed weapon. Bean was also a bigot with a nasty sense of humor, lenient to ex-Confederates and Irishmen, but murderous when sentencing non-whites. He once acquitted an Irishman accused of murdering a Chinese railroad worker, on the condition that he pay for his burial, declaring that his law book didn't specify that it was "illegal to kill a Chinaman." Suspected rustlers and horse thieves, however, could be executed on the flimsiest of evidence.

For more details of Bean's antics, see *GURPS Old West.*

Campaign uses: Bean may seem like a harmless buffoon, but if he takes a dislike to the PCs while they are in his jurisdiction, he is very likely to try to strip them of everything they're carrying -- and he has a lynch mob handy if the party tries to resist.

Other settings: Bean is a colorful but hardly unique example of a corrupt lawman given sole authority over a large but remote area. Similar characters might be found in other unsupervised frontier outposts or governing far-flung colonies in almost any era.

Ula Chandra   *235 points*

Ht 5'9", Wt 120 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 44.

Appearance: Pale complexion, waist-length braided black hair, grey eyes; an attractive woman in a white self-cleaning robe.

Languages: Tibetan (Native); English (Accented); Mandarin (Accented). [8 points] TL: 11. Cultural Familiarity: Homeline.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 13 [60]; HT 12 [20]. [120 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 24; HP 11 [0]; Will 14 [5]; Per 13 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]. [5 points]

Advantages and Perks: Attractive [4], Charisma/1 [5], Enhanced Dodge [15], Honest Face [1], Status +3 [15], Trained by a Master [30]. [70 points].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Attentive [-1], Disciplines of Faith (Monasticism) [-10], Honesty [-10], Pacifism (Self-Defense Only) [-15], Responsive [-1], Sense of Duty (Willendorfers; large group) [-10]. [-47 points]

Skills and Techniques: Administration (A) IQ [2]-13; Arm Lock (A) Default +1 [1]-15; Body Control (VH) HT-2 [2]-10; Body Language (A) Per+1 [4]-14; Breath Control (H) HT [4]-12; Diplomacy (H) IQ [4]-13; First Aid/TL11 (E) IQ

[1]-13; Gardening (E) IQ+1 [2]-14; Judo (H) DX+4 [16]-14; Leadership (A) IQ [1]-13 *; Meditation (H) Will+1 [8]-15; Mental Strength (E) Will+1 [2]-15; Mind Block (A) Will [2]-14; Philosophy (Neo-Taoism) (H) IQ+1 [8]-14; Pressure Points (H) IQ [4]-12; Psychology (Applied) (H) IQ [4]-13; Push (H) DX [4]-12; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-13; Stealth (A) DX-1 [1]-11; Swimming (E) DX [1]-12; Teaching (A) IQ+2 [8]-15. [79 points]

* +1 for Charisma

Ula Chandra is the administrator of the colony on New Willendorf, and never uses any other title -- not "Abbess," or "Reverend Mother," or even "Sifu" (teacher). She publicly maintains that the colony exists purely as a refuge for women seeking peace, solitude, and harmony with the tao: she emphatically denies that it is a school teaching esoteric martial arts or psionic skills.

Many of the women living on the small habitable area of New Willendorf are artists of some sort, and most are only temporary residents. Some attend Chandra's meditation and philosophy classes, but few are selected for more intensive training. Most of these live or work in situations where psionics are a potential threat; Chandra teaches them how to protect themselves from mind probes and mind control, and how to use body language skill to guess what telepaths are thinking. Her former students include a large number of successful female politicians, diplomats, and spies.

Chandra controls who can and cannot stay on New Willendorf, and where they are housed. The only place in the colony where a large spaceship can land is fenced off, and men are not permitted through its gates. The modified cargo mule robots are fitted with non-lethal weapons, and all of the colony's buildings are so well camouflaged that they effectively disappear if they close the shutters. On rare occasions when the colony has been attacked, Chandra has let the raiders blunder around in the swamp and jungle until they are immobilized by the robots, tangler mines, defense globes, quicksand and stunflowers. The tiny startown boasts a small hotel, staffed mostly by robots, though some Willendorfers will mingle with male visitors there. Chandra makes a point of meeting all visitors at least briefly, and is unusually approachable for an autocrat.

Campaign uses: Chandra grants exclusive one-year contracts to independent traders for the passenger and mail run between New Willendorf and the nearest worlds. These are sufficiently lucrative for a small ship and crew that competition is fierce: if the PCs manage to impress Chandra, they may have a year or more of guaranteed income with the opportunity to meet some very interesting women, and possibly even have the chance to be Trained by a Master. If Chandra becomes an enemy, she may be able to persuade some of her former students to target the PCs; she will not have them killed, but may well have them banned from several worlds, deprived of important licenses, or even jailed.

Other settings: Chandra is a benevolent dictator who really is "beloved of the people" -- those who object to her rule are not only free to leave her domain, but sometimes actively encouraged to do so. A colony like hers might exist in isolated areas in earlier eras, but in lower-tech settings, it would probably need something more robust in the way of defenses, such as gun turrets or Amazonian warriors.

Deersinger, Tribal Shaman and Chief   *85 points*

Ht 5'10", Wt 160 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 34.

Appearance: A well-fed Cro-Magnon man with a weatherbeaten complexion, shaggy grizzled hair and beard, right eye brown, left eye green, broken nose, scarred arms and hands.

Languages: Tribal (Native). TL: 0. Cultural Familiarity: Homeline.

Attributes: ST 12 [20]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 11 [10]. [50 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29; HP 12 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 13 [10]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]. [10 points]

Advantages and Perks: Animal Empathy [5], Penetrating Voice [1], Reputation (Powerful Shaman, +4 to reaction rolls, known to all neighboring tribes, recognized on 7 or less) [3], Status +3 [15], Talent (Outdoorsman)/2 [20], Temperature Tolerance/2 [2], Voice [10], Wealth (Comfortable) [10]. [55 points].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Dependents (Children, 50% points, appear on 15-) [-60], Lecherousness (12) [-15], Lunacy [-10], Proud [-1], Sense of Duty (Tribe, small group) [-5], Short Lifespan [-10], Stubbornness [-5]. [-106 points]

Skills and Techniques: Acting (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Brawling (E) DX [1]-10; Fast-Talk (A) IQ+2 [2]-13 *; Fishing (E) Per+1 [1]-14 †; First Aid/TL0 (E) IQ [2]-12; Leadership (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Melee Weapon (Spear) (A) DX+1 [4]-11; Mimicry (Animal Sounds) (H) IQ+5 [8]-16 *†; Mimicry (Speech) (H) IQ+2 [4]-13 *; Naturalist (H) IQ+2 [4]-13 †; Pharmacy/TL0 (Herbal) (H) IQ [8]-12; Public Speaking (A) IQ+1 [4]-14 *; Sex Appeal (A) HT+1 [1]-12 *; Singing (E) HT+2 [1]-13 *; Spear Thrower (A) DX+1 [4]-11; Stealth (A) DX+1 [4]-11; Survival (A) Per+2 [2]-13 †; Teaching (A) IQ-1 [1]-9; Thrown Weapon (Spear) (E) DX [1]-10; Tracking (A) Per+1 [4]-14 †. [61 points]

Spells: Beast-Soother (H) IQ+1 [2]-12; Beast-Summoning (H) IQ+3 [8]-14. [10 points]

* +2 from Voice
† +2 from Talent (Outdoorsman)

Gear: Stone-tipped spear; Spear Thrower; Fur Tunic, Leggings, and Boots; Fur mask (worn during rituals); First Aid kit in pouch.

Deersinger has risen to the leadership of his tribe mostly because of his proven ability to find animals or bring them to him to be slaughtered. His three wives and seven surviving children are the best-fed in the tribe, and don't mind flaunting their good fortune. Deersinger is also the tribe's most skilled healer, though this owes more to his knowledge of medicinal herbs than to his chanted prayers. At most times, Deersinger is a competent leader, able to keep the tribe well-fed and happy while still indulging his own weaknesses.

When things turn sour, though, Deersinger tends to think of himself and his family first, and others later. He hates taking advice unless it's sweetened with flattery. He will be very reluctant to yield power to anyone else, even in a situation where he is totally out of his depth, such as a war with another tribe. He's not above a little deliberate fraud, occasionally using his ability to mimic voices to add credibility to séances in which the tribe's dead former chiefs apparently make suggestions that benefit Deersinger. He's also caused younger men who refuse to share their wives with him (he prefers plump brunettes) to be humiliated, injured or killed in hunting "accidents".

Campaign uses: In a Paleolithic campaign, Deersinger may be the chief of the PCs tribe, or of a tribe competing for the same hunting grounds. In a Time Travel or Lost World campaign, he may offer the PCs hospitality and much needed food -- though possibly at a price female PCs are not willing to pay -- or lead his tribe into battle against them.

Other settings: Deersinger would fit into any low-tech tribe -- Native Americans in the Old West, Africans in a Victorian-era or Cliffhangers campaign, or primitives (human or alien) on a distant planet. With a little tweaking, he might also be an explorer or time-traveler secretly using ultra-tech medicine and devices to win the trust of the tribe for his own reasons.

Lucia Diaz, President of Tlalocan   *490 points*

Ht 5'11", Wt 155 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 37.

Appearance: Tanned complexion, golden blond hair, brown eyes; a beautiful woman in expensive clothes.

Languages: Spanish (Native); English (Native); French (Accented). [10 points] TL: 8. Cultural Familiarity: Homeline.

Attributes: ST 17 [70]; DX 14 [80]; IQ 13 [60]; HT 14 [40]. [250 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d+2/3d-1; BL 58; HP 17 [0]; Will 16 [15]; Per 14 [5]; FP 14 [0]; Basic Speed 7 [0]; Basic Move 7 [0]. [20 points]

Advantages and Perks: Beautiful [12], Charisma/3 [15], Combat Reflexes [15], Empathy [15], Fashion Sense [5], Flexibility [5], Night Vision/5 [5], Status +6 [20; 2 levels free with Wealth], Talent: Smooth Operator/1 [15], Voice [10], Wealth (Multimillionaire/1) [75]. [167 points].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Bully (12) [-10], Chauvinistic [-1], Greed (12) [-15], Megalomania [-10], Overconfidence (12) [-5], Sadism (9) [-22], Selfish (15) [-2]. [-55 points]

Skills and Techniques: Acrobatics (H) DX [2]-13; Acting (A) IQ [3]-15 ª; Administration (A) IQ [1]-12; Area Knowledge (Tlalocan, Small Nation) (E) IQ+2 [4]-15; Climbing (A) DX+2 [1]-16 ‡; Current Affairs/TL8 (Politics) (E) IQ+2 [4]-15; Dancing (A) DX [2]-14; Detect Lies (H) Per+3 [2]-17 ‡ª; Diplomacy (H) IQ [4]-16 *ª; Economics (H) IQ [2]-12; Erotic Art (A) DX+3 [2]-17 ‡; Escape (H) DX+1 [1]-15 ‡; Fast-Talk (A) IQ+3 [2]-16 *ª; Geography (Political) (H) IQ [4]-13; Guns/TL8 (Pistol) (E) DX+1 [2]-15; Intimidation (A) Will+1 [2]-17 ª; Karate (H) DX+1 [8]-15; Leadership (A) IQ+4 [2]-17 §ª; Make-up/TL8 (E) IQ+2 [4]-15; Performance (A) IQ+3 [4]-16 *; Politics (A) IQ+5 [8]-18 *ª; Propaganda (A) IQ [4]-14; Psychology (Applied) (H) IQ+2 [2]-15 †; Public Speaking (A) IQ+6 [2]-19 *§ª; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [2]-16 *; Sex Appeal (A) HT+4 [4]-18 *ª; Singing (E) HT+2 [1]-16 *; Stealth (A) DX-1 [1]-13; Streetwise (A) IQ+1 [2]-14 ª. [83 points]

* +2 for Voice

† +3 for Empathy

‡ +3 for Flexibility

§ +3 for Charisma

ª +1 for Smooth Operator

Variants: Powers version: add Mind Control [50], Regeneration (Fast) [50].

Lucia Corona was a minor actress and singer and part-time dominatrix until Tlalocan's president Julio Diaz saw her in a chop-sockey action film and invited her to perform in his national casino. Lucia became his mistress, his wife, and his widow in the space of less than a year, and is widely suspected to be the reason he died of a heart attack. After inheriting Diaz's lands, fortune, and taste for power, Lucia decided to stay on the tiny island and campaign for the presidency herself. Nine years later, she has consolidated her grasp on power, and some of her opponents joke that they hope she's only president-for-life. Some superstitious types on the island, where voodoo is still widely practiced, suspect that she's either a powerful houngan or a Cat Person (see *GURPS Voodoo*). Whether or not this is true is up to the GM, but Lucia Diaz is undeniably a monster.

Julio Diaz enjoyed watching the torture of political prisoners; Lucia preferred to be an active participant. Julio sometimes filmed her beating and humiliating her victims (always wearing a full-face mask), and a few of these films were exported. After Julio's death, Lucia continued to indulge her sadism: she prefers not to kill her victims, but never releases them.

Tlalocan, a tiny Caribbean island close to Cuba, has few legal exports apart from tobacco, cheap rum, and pornography. Cocaine and marijuana are also grown there, but the economy is mostly based on its status as a tax haven and its lack of extradition treaties: a large number of wealthy criminals have retired there. (In a *Powers* campaign, the island will also be a sanctuary for metavillains, black magicians and mad gadgeteers.) These criminals have worked with the island's secret police to keep any political opposition weak, ensuring Lucia Diaz's continued grip on power.

Campaign uses: PCs who visit Tlalocan for any reason had better hope not to be arrested. On Tlalocan, Lucia and her agents appear almost all the time (see p. B36), making her a very dangerous Enemy. Fortunately, though she dreams of

conquering neighboring islands, Lucia has very little influence beyond the shores of Tlalocan.

Other settings: Lucia Diaz is designed as a Master Villain for a cinematic Espionage or Supers campaign -- but murderous and sadistic female rulers are a staple of fiction, and not unknown in history (Elizabeth Bathory being an extreme example). With a little tweaking, a version of Lucia Diaz could rule anywhere from ancient Egypt to a Galactic Empire.

Captain Richard King RAF, Commander of the Tower   *275 points*

Ht 5'11", Wt 170 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 48.

Appearance: Pale complexion, short dark brown hair, blue eyes; a healthy-looking man in patched leathers.

Languages: English (Native); French (Accented); German (Broken). [6 points] TL: 6. Cultural Familiarity: Ariane.

Attributes: ST 11 [10]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 12 [20]. [110 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24; HP 11 [0]; Will 13 [5]; Per 13 [5]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6 [0]; Basic Move 3 [0]. [15 points]

Advantages and Perks: Allies (War Council, Present on 15-, group of 6-10, 50% point total) [36], Combat Reflexes [15], Fit [5], Military Rank/4 [20], Night Vision/1 [1], Status +3 [15], Temperature Tolerance/1 [1]. [92 points].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Chauvinistic [-1], Chronic Pain (Severe, 1 hour interval, 12-) [-10], Code of Honor (Soldier's) [-10], Dislikes being called "King Richard" [-1], Lame (Crippled Leg) [-10], Responsive [-1], Sense of Duty (Tower community) [-10]; Stubborn when in pain [-1]. [-44 points]

Skills and Techniques: Administration (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Area Knowledge (London) (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Brawling (E) DX [1]-12; Detect Lies (H) IQ [4]-12; Diplomacy (H) IQ-1 [2]-11; Driving/TL6 (Automobile) (A) DX [2]-12; Fast-Talk (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; First Aid/TL6 (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Fishing (E) Per+1 [1]-14; Gunner/TL6 (Machine Gun) (E) DX+2 [4]-14; Guns/TL6 (Rifle) (E) DX+2 [4]-14; History (England) (H) IQ-1 [2]-11; Leadership (A) IQ+2 [8]-14; Melee Weapon (Spear) (A) DX+1 [4]-13; Meteorology/TL6 (A) IQ [2]-12; Navigation (Air) (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Piloting/TL6 (Light Airplane) (A) DX+2 [8]-14; Psychology (Applied) (H) IQ-1 [2]-11; Public Speaking (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Riding (Horse) (A) DX [1]-11; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-12; Savoir-Faire (Military) (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Scrounging (E) Per+1 [2]-14; Search (A) Per+1 [4]-14; Soldier (A) IQ+2 [8]-14; Strategy (Land) (H) IQ+1 [8]-13; Streetwise (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Survival (Woodlands) (A) Per [2]-13; Swimming (E) DX [1]-12; Tactics (H) IQ [4]-12; Thrown Weapon (Grenade) (E) DX+1 [2]-13; Urban Survival (A) Per+1 [4]-14. [103 points]

Gear: Auto Pistol, .45 (TL6) in belt holster with woven steel lanyard; small folding knife; large knife; leather jacket with sleeves; leather cap; shoes. When expecting trouble, add Bolt-Action Rifle, 7.62mm, with bayonet (treat as spear); steel pot.

Before the Plague, Captain Richard King was a Royal Air Force fighter ace -- twice decorated for valor, but not expected to rise any higher in the ranks. When the Plague broke out, he was reassigned to transporting much-needed medical supplies. Stranded in London when there was no more fuel, he decided to stay and defend the wounded, the hospital, and what remained of the city. Eventually, he and his new-found followers abandoned the hospital in favor of the fortified Tower of London, which he began turning into a fortress.

Twenty-one years after the Plague, Richard King is undisputed leader of the Tower and its community. He has turned nearby parks into farms, and the Tower now houses a school, a small hospital, a smithy and a variety of workshops, and a garrison of the best-trained and best-equipped soldiers in post-war England.

As commander of the Tower's forces, King is the single most powerful person in London, but he knows the limits of his expertise, and always listens to his mostly civilian Council -- especially Dr. Becky Crowe, an 81-year-old Quaker

immunologist and lecturer who he refers to as his Minister of Health, Science, and Education, and who is able to have him declared unfit. With the Council's help, King's struggle to maintain tech level 6 and a recognizable version of the British way of life in London has been largely successful, and he is slowly and cautiously civilizing outlying areas.

Campaign uses: Richard King is intended as a Patron in a Survivors campaign, but he could also become an Enemy.

Other settings: Richard King is meant as the leader of a post-holocaust community, but with minor tweaking he might also be military governor of a frontier outpost, or a soldier-turned-politician in charge of a small country or planet.

King Ryons of Northgalis, Ireland, and Many Isles   *285 points*

7'3", Wt 310 lbs, Size Modifier +1, Age 39.

Appearance: Ruddy complexion, receding red hair, blue eyes; a huge powerfully-built man with a full beard.

Languages: English (Native), Latin (Broken), Gaelic (Broken). [4 points] TL: 3. Cultural Familiarity: "Camelot" Myth Parallel.

Attributes: ST 13 [30]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 13 [30]. [100 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d/2d-1; BL 34; HP 13 [0]; Will 13 [10]; Per 11 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6 [0]; Basic Move 7 [0]. [5 points]

Advantages and Perks: Allies (Knights, Present on 15-, group of 21-50, 50% point total) [60], Combat Reflexes [15], Fearlessness +3 [6], High Pain Threshold [10], Status +7 [30; 1 level free from Wealth], Wealth (Wealthy) [20]. [141 points].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Bully (6) [-20]*; Chauvinistic [-1]; Gigantism [0]; Ironic sense of humor [-1]; Lecherousness (9) [-22] *; Overconfidence (12) [-5]*; Megalomania [-10]; Sense of Duty (Knights) [-10]; Trims his cloak with the beards of kings he's defeated [-1]. [-70 points]

Skills and Techniques: Acting (A) IQ [2]-11; Administration (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Area Knowledge (British Isles) (E) IQ+1 [2]-12; Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Carousing (E) HT+1 [2]-14; Detect Lies (H) IQ [4]-11; Fast-Talk (A) IQ [2]-11; Heraldry (A) IQ [2]-11; Interrogation (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Intimidation (A) Will [4]-14; Knife (E) DX+1 [1]-11; Lance (A) DX+3 [8]-14; Leadership (A) IQ+2 [8]-13; Melee Weapon (Broadsword) (A) DX+3 [12]-15; Melee Weapon (Spear) (A) DX+1 [2]-12; Navigation (Ground) (A) IQ [2]-11; Psychology (Applied) (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Riding (Horse) (A) DX+3 [8]-14; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-11; Sex Appeal (A) HT [2]-11; Shield (E) DX+3 [8]-14; Strategy (Land) (H) IQ+1 [8]-12; Streetwise (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Survival (Woodlands) (A) Per [1]-11; Tactics (H) IQ+1 [8]-12; Thrown Weapon (Knife) (E) DX [1]-11; Thrown Weapon (Spear) (E) DX+1 [2]-12. [105 points]

Gear: Fine Bastard Sword; Lance; Large Knife; Heavy Steel Corselet with heavy plate arms and legs; Greathelm; Heavy Gauntlets; Sollerets; Medium Shield; Heavy Warhorse with plate barding, face mask and head/neck armor.

In the years after the death of Uther Pendragon, inheriting a kingdom didn't guarantee that you could keep it. By the time Arthur drew the sword from the stone, Ryons, who claimed descent from the Greek hero Herakles, had already defeated 11 kings and forced them to shave off their beards as a sign of their tribute to him. He didn't join the 11 kings who fought against Arthur at the battle of Bedegraine, but took advantage of the chaos to attack Leodegrance of Cameliard, Arthur's future father-in-law.

Ryons had decorated his cloak with the beards of the kings he'd defeated, and he demanded that the young Arthur shave his so that he'd have an even dozen. With the aid of Merlin, Arthur's knights Balin and Balan ambushed Ryons while he was on the way to visit the Lady de Vance, slew more than 40 of his men, and brought him to Arthur. Ryons yielded to Arthur rather than be slain, forfeiting his lands, but later met him in single combat and was decapitated with

one blow from Excalibur.

Vicious as Ryons was, he was also a successful leader, and his men remained loyal to him until his capture.

Campaign uses: With his undisputed courage and cunning, his ironic sense of humor and streak of cruelty, King Ryons would be make excellent villain for an adventure set in the early days of Arthur's reign. The PCs might be knights or mercenaries the service of a king who Ryons is attacking (or who he has already defeated, if you want to re-enact the story of the forty-seven ronin in Arthurian Britain), or villagers in the path of Ryons' army who find themselves having to defend themselves from looters. Ryons might also become a Patron for a less ethical group.

Other settings: With very minor changes, Ryons could be an ambitious warlord in almost any feudal or fantasy setting.

Adventure Seeds

A Mammoth Undertaking *(Time Travel):* The heroes accompany a nature film crew traveling to the Pleistocene, and persuade Deersinger to summon the animals they want to shoot. However, Deersinger is better at summoning dangerous animals than he is at controlling them, and the film crew flees in panic when mammoth come stampeding towards them. Deersinger, his hunters, and the PCs go looking for the scattered crew -- but can they trust the shaman, or does he have an ulterior motive?

By the Book *(Fantasy):* The adventurers learn that the tribute King Ryons has collected from the kings he's defeated includes a powerful grimoire. Knowing that Ryons is frequently away from his castle, they hatch a plan to break in and steal it. Unfortunately, they're trapped in the castle when the king and his knights return earlier than expected -- and Ryons is not known for his forgiving nature.

Habeas Corpus *(Deadlands):* The party is passing through Langtry on election day, when the saloon is suddenly besieged by walkin' dead from Boot Hill. The dead are led by the victims of Judge Roy Bean's rough brand of justice, and all are determined to vote Bean out of office. Bean and his cronies start firing when they recognize some of the corpses, and the dead counterattack. The PCs can join in the fight on either side, or try using Acting, Fast-Talk or Stealth to get out of the saloon unharmed.

Vulture Culture *(Powers):* Tlalocan has become a haven for unethical scientists, and the heroes hear a rumor that one of these has created an bioweapon that can kill, cripple or sterilize men, but has no effect on women. Unfortunately, the only person who knows the whereabouts of the scientist, his lab or the culture (if it exists) is Lucia Diaz. At the very least, the PCs will have to break into her presidential palace and search through her papers; more probably, they'll have to interrogate or mind probe Diaz herself.

Battle Beneath the Earth *(Survivors):* Someone has been hijacking wagonloads of fertilizer, and Richard King suspects that his enemies are planning to turn it into explosives to undermine the Tower. He calls for volunteers to explore the London Underground: the job pays better than guard duty or farming, and there's the potential to salvage some valuable items, but the tunnels are also rumored to be full of dangerous mutant strains of everything from viruses to wolves, as well as feral humans.

Lady Bountiful *(Space):* A telepath seeking refuge on New Willendorf realizes that her neighbor is Tia Breton, wanted for manufacturing and selling counterfeit medications that have cost dozens of lives. Breton shows no sign of leaving the colony; if the PCs want to bring her to justice (or collect the $100,000 bounty), they'll have to find a way to get past Ula Chandra.

Pyramid Review

Dungeons & Zombies (for [All Flesh Must Be Eaten](#))

Published by [Eden Studios, Inc.](#)

Written by Jason Vey with Ross A. Isaacs

Cover by Jon Hodgson

Illustrated by C. Brent Ferguson, Travis Ingram, Jonathon Kirtz, Dan Oropallo, Cary Polkovitz, Gregory Price, George Vasilakos, & Kiran Yanner

160-page 7¼"×9¼" b&w softcover; $24

After a whirlwind ride into the [past](#) and though a gamut of [genres](#), and even a step into the [post-post apocalypse](#) when the zombies have won, the RPG of surviving the corpse cortege, *All Flesh Must Be Eaten,* takes us back to the original roleplaying genre -- fantasy. Yet worry not, dear reader, for *Dungeons & Zombies* is not a book about filling an evil overlord's underground demesne with extra members of the cadaver cavalcade. Well . . . actually it is, but you get more than that. Quite a bit more.

Dungeons & Zombies is the game's sourcebook for the fantasy genre, which right from the start acknowledges its inspiration with Jon Hodgson's tribute to that most parodied of covers. So the question is, how does the supplement handle the genre? First it introduces two new character types that let you do heroic fantasy. While the Norm type handles the likes of mere townsfolk and peasantry, and the Inspired type will happily handle clerics, most *other* characters can be created using the Survivor character type. Mages and sorcerors though will need to take the new Adept Hero type and also purchase the Gift quality to power their spells. For more "heroic" characters, the Talented Hero is the character type of choice.

But this is just the starting block, because to simulate a certain game with all of its races and classes, *Dungeons & Zombies* goes on a ransacking spree through several other UniSystem supplements and RPGs. And once it returns with its trophies from *[Enter the Zombie,](#) [Terra Primate,](#)* and both the *[Buffy the Vampire Slayer](#)* and the *[Angel](#)* RPGs, it uses them to construct fantasy races -- Dwarf, Elf, Gnome, and so on, and Profession Qualities to closely model those classes of an *oh so* familiar game. Thus you can play a cleric, paladin, ranger, or swashbuckler from those given, and constructing others is hardly a challenge. Wizards and psychics do not receive Profession Qualities, but they are just as easy to create, as are other fantasy races.

To reflect the genre, magic has also been expanded, with the Gifted channeling Essence in the mode of the cleric or druid, and the mage employing Invocations, rituals, and formulae to weave Essence into the desired result. An Invocation involves the summoning, focusing, and dismissal of Essence, and once summoned, has an intoxicating effect until dismissed. If not dismissed, then this effect can become adverse. Invocations come in a variety of flavors, but primarily those of the four elements. They are purchased as a skill with five ranks available. Also included are rules for Necromancy, itself available in four flavors -- Death Lordship, Death Mastery, Death Speech, and Death Raising. Mostly employed by the average Dark Lord, in *Dungeons & Zombies* the art of Necromancy is not necessarily evil. Rather, it is evil by intent and use. These rules are in fact a lighter adaptation of those found in the publisher's post-apocalyptic RPG, *Armageddon,* and a Zombie Master wanting more detail is directed to that game or *WitchCraft.*

After a quick and dirty guide to creating magical items designed to emulate the swords & sorcery sub-genre, *Dungeons & Zombies* discusses the process of world creation. This is equally quick and dirty, but the four pages do an excellent job, and the process is easily aided by the application of these guidelines to one of the book's four Deadworlds.

The first of these Deadworlds is "Dead Gods and Demon Lands," a setting evoking the writings of Fritz Leiber and Robert Howard. In this pulp fantasy, the land of Iurth has become the battleboard of the gods. With a convoluted cosmology, the various deities of Light and Darkness, Order and Chaos, all war over a land in which access to the Afterlife has been denied, forcing the dead to rise again as hungry zombies. Besides these Restless Dead, other zombies are the creation of the gods, Kali and Ahriman. This is a Deadworld in which to adventure rather than go on an epic quest, the characters undertaking relatively small-scale tasks and threats.

"Dawn of a Dead Age" is more typical fare, being Epic Fantasy and thus on a much grander scale. In the medieval land of Domhain, shards of the Apocalypse Blade have been found and the Dark Lord Adramalech has awakened after a millennia long slumber. With a heavy Celtic feel, Dawn of a Dead age is intended to model Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey as the discovery of part of a sword marks the beginning of a great quest that will finish with the player cast facing a great evil. Again there is more than one type of zombie, the risen dead forced to do the Dark Lord's bidding, and the Shedim, the bodies of the Sidhe now occupied by demons. Of course, they are also one more parallel with a certain very popular book.

As the title suggests, "Death of the Round Table" is an Arthurian-inspired Deadworld, set in the last years of the king's reign when his despair darkened the land. Galahad's quest to find the grail and restore the kingdom has failed, enabling Morgan le Fey and Mordred to take power and taint the land with their evil. Worse still, the Grail has been put to perverse ends, helping to raise an army of zombies that includes many former members of the Round Table. This is another Deadworld involving a quest, this time to regain the Grail and restore the kingdom.

The last Deadworld goes East, "The Eastern Dead" being an Asian fantasy with ninja, samurai, and fox spirits replacing assassins, knights, and elves. Set in the Three Kingdoms of Samguk -- a mixture of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese cultures -- this Deadworld is beset by demons from Jigoku, the Land of the Dead. The demons are of course, supported by a growing army of undead. This all bears resemblance to a certain Oriental RPG, but this is not to say that this Deadworld is derivative. Finally, there is "The Tomb of Doom," probably the very first dungeon bash for the UniSystem. Not a Deadworld in the conventional sense, this adventure even starts in a tavern!

Dungeons & Zombies does exactly what you have to expect for a supplement for *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* -- explore a genre and present suitable Deadworlds ready to play in. Yet it does something more than others of its ilk, serving to showcase how a particular type of game can be run using the UniSystem. In this way, and in its Deadworlds, *Dungeons & Zombies* is actually the most accessible of all the *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* supplements, because at its heart, its genre is the most familiar.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Pick

Miskatonic University: A Handbook to the Pride of Arkham

Published by [Chaosium Inc.](#)

Written by Sam Johnson with Sandy Antunes, Richard Watts, Keith Herber, Alan Matthews, Chris Tutt, Doyle Tavener, Lynn Willis, and dyvers hands

Illustrated by Philip R. Rogers (cover painting), David Grilla, Alex Thomas, Paul Carrick, and Tom Kalichack, with maps by David Conyers

256-page b&w softcover; $29.95

Miskatonic University is one of the key elements in H. P. Lovecraft's fiction. Many of his protagonists are scholars or scientists, and Miskatonic University is the academic institution they're most likely to have been involved with, as students, faculty members, or recipients of funding. *Miskatonic University,* recently released book from Chaosium, provides a guide to the university and its setting, and is designed to meet the needs of GMs running campaigns based on the Cthulhu Mythos. In the process, the authors have produced some material that GMs might want to borrow for other sorts of campaigns as well.

Usefulness to GMs is a major emphasis of this book. The introduction explores different functions Miskatonic can play in a campaign and suggests ways of using the book to serve each of them. Johnson rightly emphasizes that the GM, or "Keeper," is the ultimate author of the campaign and needs to make his own creative decisions about how to set it up. This book provides raw materials that can be used for that purpose.

The opening chapter focuses on the history of the university, from the days of the Salem witch trials to the "modern day" of the 1920s, H. P. Lovecraft's own era. It includes a street map of the campus and a building-by-building guide to its layout. There's as much attention to everyday life in the university community as there is to horrors and secrets; a campaign set here could be well grounded in daily life. Two buildings in particular -- the Orne Library and the Exhibit Museum -- get detailed descriptions, including maps, lists of books, and character sheets for people who can be met there; the library is especially well realized and could be very useful as a continuing location for research scenes.

The second chapter is titled "People on Campus" and does actually contain a large number of biographical sketches, with 28 character writeups. But there's more to the chapter than that. It's a guide to the life of a university, as seen by students, graduate students, and faculty; it covers the daily routine, costs of living, departmental politics, and fraternities, sororities, and clubs. Some of the character descriptions hint at involvement with the Cthulhu Mythos or other sorts of alien or supernatural horror, but that's not the main theme of this chapter. Both the Recent Expeditions Map and Chronology and the character sheet for William Moore (a member of the geology faculty) provide links to another supplement, *Beyond the Mountains of Madness,* which describes an expedition to Antarctica supported by Miskatonic University.

The third chapter is the heart of the book as far as game mechanics is concerned. It provides rules for actually being a student and getting an education. These are organized around the concept of the Semester Check, a commitment of time to some activity over the course of a semester. Each student gets six Semester Checks, which are typically committed to four courses, a sport or hobby, and daily life and social contacts. Semester Checks can be divided into half units, and invested in up to eight different activities; there are penalties for shorting an activity and rewards for

putting extra effort into it, making this an entertaining resource management game, one that could profitably be borrowed for campaigns in other academic settings from Hogwarts to the University of California Sunnydale. In the process, students choose courses (the book's approach steers neatly between the tedium of an actual course catalog and the vagueness of handwaving everything) and determine grades earned, so that after four years a character will have not only a list of skills acquired but also a transcript.

The fourth chapter presents a variety of secret places and organizations to be found at Miskatonic University. Some of these could provide aid and support to PCs; some would be deadly threats; some could go either way. Lovecraftian characters such as Nathaniel Wingate Peaslee and Asenath Waite put in appearances. Naturally, the university has a tunnel complex that adventurous students can explore, and where they may encounter ghouls, sinister little people from Irish folklore (one of the book's least successful ideas, to my taste), or both. The various secretive organizations look a lot like real academic factions, and would be useful to a conspiratorial campaign about hidden mystical cabals in the modern world. One way to use this book would be as a setting for a non-Mythos campaign about Hermetic sorcerers, parapsychological researchers, or other people studying Things Man Was Not Meant to Know; this chapter would be a big help.

The fifth chapter is the obligatory brief scenario. Discussing it would give away things that GMs would need to keep secret; but it looks well planned, with horrific events, multiple layers of clues, more character examples, and links to other parts of the occult world of Miskatonic University.

Finally, an appendix provides useful information on several topics, along with blank diplomas and degree plan worksheets that can be photocopied. The rules for studying Mythos tomes carry on the theme of resource management and might better have been placed in the main text, perhaps in chapter three.

As a whole, this book is a bit hard to describe; it has a sensible organizational scheme, but it reads more like a collection of documents than like a comprehensive treatise on a subject. It's not a packaged campaign, but a resource that can be used to create a campaign. Most GMs will want to use it selectively. Fortunately, it's well suited to that kind of use; the quality of its various parts is high, and several sections, such as the Semester Check mechanic in chapter three and the material in chapters one and four on the Orne Library and the head librarian, Henry Armitage, are brilliant. This book will especially reward the GM who, like a proper Lovecraftian scholar, loves reading books closely looking for hints of deeper meanings.

Sam Johnson's version of Miskatonic University could be the setting for a Mythos campaign, focused either on faculty or on students; it would be especially useful for a student campaign, following a cast of characters from admission as freshman to graduation, or even on into graduate school. Or, if it followed the book's suggestion to start in fall of 1928, it could lead up to a band of new graduates signing onto the Starkweather-Moore Expedition already described in *Beyond the Mountains of Madness. Miskatonic University* volume could also be a resource for a GM whose campaign was set elsewhere, but needed a scholarly institution for investigators to consult. Finally, any GM running a campaign set on a university, or any sort of school, could find inspiration in this book's treatment of student life and choices.

--William H. Stoddard

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

Murphy's Rules

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Things I Hate As A Player

I'm riding the pet peeve money train for all it's worth, and this week the pooh-pooh choo-choo is taking us through the things that tick me off as a player.

Standard disclaimers apply . . . these may not be the biggest things, but they're up there.

* * *

RPGs that don't let me make the concept I want. I have a philosophy of character design: An RPG should permit me to make *any* character I can conceive, even if it's required to be a watered-down version of that concept. For example, if I want a character who's a millionaire diplomat, then the game should enable me to buy up levels of wealth and diplomacy. If I have a character who believes he's divinely empowered to do great deeds, then the game should let me at least get close to that idea (such as by taking some type of Luck power, which I can chalk up to my character's empowerment). And if I'm playing a Supers game and I want to make a mild-mannered reporter with flight, heat vision, and strength, I should be able to do that.

Now, as far as I'm concerned, the *magnitude* of the adherence isn't crucial. In other words, it's not as essential that I be able to make a character who's one of the 10 wealthiest in the world, so much as I have significantly above-average wealth that I can use in certain situations. Likewise, my mild-mannered reporter doesn't need to be able to fly fast enough to turn the Earth back in time, so long as he's able to fly at all. In this way it's usually possible to (for example) make Superhombre with (in *GURPS* terms) 200 points, 500 points, or 2,000 points; it's only the magnitude that is different.

Unfortunately, too many games don't permit this. The number one offender -- in quantity, if not egregiousness -- are the original *(Advanced) Dungeons & Dragons* games (including most flavors of the *d20 System*). Without GM fiat, there wasn't any way to start a character as (say) a wealthy merchant, or a cursed magician, or an incognito prince, or any of a jillion other fantasy concepts I could concoct. Nope; you were stuck with being that first-level cleric, with a mace and one casting of *cure light wounds.* Wake me when you're dying.

This was especially true of games where there was no real character-creation system so much as a character-generation system. The original TSR *Marvel Super-Heroes* RPG, for example, didn't have any type of means of giving player guidance toward character creation, relying instead on an entirely on random creation. By far, this reached new levels of existential goofiness with the release of the *Ultimate Powers Handbook,* where eleventy-jillion different powers were all but guaranteed to collide on the charts in mad-whack ways. ("Okay, so my new mutant has plant growth, acute sense of smell, and probability manipulation? Terrific . . . Ummm . . . call me 'Lucky Green-Thumb Big-Nose.' Whee.")

Hey, games: I play RPGs so I can be a different person . . . a different person I *want* to be! Don't make that any more difficult for me than it has to be.

* * *

Games that don't tell me what "average" is. There is a surprisingly common affliction that many skill-based games have (among others): they don't tell you what people typically have, or (if they do provide some guidance) how normal competent people do their jobs.

I cannot stress how important this information is in trying to design a character, especially in an unfamiliar system. Is someone with a doctorate in a skill rolling 3D, 5D, or 8D? Does a world-renowned expert in that field of knowledge have a skill of 15, 18, or 21? And so on. Knowing what the designers of a game had in mind is important, especially if they're assuming that additional rules will be used by people fairly often. For example, the *D6 System* (among many other games) provides a bonus for taking extra time; so, for example, by taking twice as long as the default at a task, you can gain an extra die -- rolling, say, 5D instead of 4D. Now, it's entirely possible to assume that most professional

people are normally "taking extra time"; in this way, all professionals could have 4D in a skill while competent PC heros have 5D . . . and heroes, being heroic, are able to perform their acts at the same level of competence as a professional, albeit in a much faster time frame.

Unfortunately, not all games give this information, and the difficulty it presents is two-fold: I don't know what level my characters are performing at, and I don't know what level others are performing at. So, for example, when I designed a character for *Fading Suns,* I gave a level of competence that I had assumed would be comparable to a reasonable swordsman (since I was designing within the parameters of the game system). Sadly, this was not to be, and having gotten smoked in my first outings by low-powered opposition, I cursed the game for not informing me of what I needed. (And let's not forget the Big Laffs that awaited me after actually believing *In Nomine's* character creation rules that said an average celestial or excellent human had a characteristic roll of 6; do you know how often you'll fail if you're rolling for a 6 or less on 2d6?)

For me, the games that always did this the best were those that had "caps" along with logical structures. For example, White Wolf's Storyteller system had a five-point scale for all skills and attributes (not counting zero). If I wanted a novice, I could give one point; if I wanted a doctorate-level, I could give four points; if I wanted the best human potential, I could give five points; and so on. And, mercifully, most players as well as most source material interpreted the levels in the same way, resulting in a lot less of the "Well, gee, I thought 14 in a skill was a doctorate, but I keep looking really dumb in comparison with these other NPCs" situations.

* * *

Games with poorly designed character sheets. In my mind, there's nothing quite as amazing as a good character sheet. At their best, character sheets should be simultaneously evocative, informative, and well-organized; with a good character sheet and a simple enough system, I can explain the entire game to a new player using nothing but that character sheet. The *D6 System* pre-made templates are good example of this (especially the old *Star Wars* system), since these sheets are friendly, big-fonted, and usually contain an image that is evocative of the character's abilities -- it's a lot easier to tell a newbie that their character is big and strong when you show them a huge-muscled dude with an axe on their character sheet.

Unfortunately, too many games have character sheets that were created as an afterthought, designed as a slap-dash assortment of stats, abilities, and (if you're lucky) charts. And some of these sheets seemed to be made as if they were actually antagonistic, and *not* designed by gamers for gamers. In my mind, by far the most egregious example of this was the original *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* Character Sheets from their supplement of (I believe) the same name. Sure, the character sheet itself was not much to write home about . . . uninspiring and fairly dull. However, its crimes went beyond mediocrity. To thwart photocopying -- since, y'know, six bucks for 32 pages of heavy-use character aids might inspire such -- they made them a garish gold color. This color, in addition to being useful in color-matching marine rescue equipment, caused headaches for me in any situation where I was forced to stare at it for longer than an hour at a time . . . which is to say, every time I would have actual need of it.

Too many character sheets fall into a "what were they thinking" category . . . for example, listing attributes on one side of a sheet and skills on the other, despite the fact that you need both to do any roll. (In-game sound effects: <flip> <flip> <flip> <flip> <flip> . . .) Others have an intrinsic flaw that indicates to me the designers weren't thinking like gamers. One of the big class of offenders was around the late 1990s, where full-color hardcover RPGs were just starting to come into their own as a concept, but we weren't quite at the level of omnipresent support material PDFs from the companies. As a result, many of these games had beautiful full-color character sheets that were incredibly painful to try to use, since they photocopied awfully. (Last Unicorn's *Star Trek* line: I'm looking at you.)

One of my good gamer friends' test of *any* new RPG was to crack open the book to the back and see what the character sheet looked like. While I'm not that persnickety about them, they're still high on my list of things that drive me up a wall when it comes to a new game.

* * *

Well, now that I've the raised hackles back in "hack 'n' slash," feel free to offer up your own ideas for things that tick

you off as a player over on the [message boards](#) or by [e-mail](#). Because anger is the gift that keeps on giving.

--Steven Marsh

Icosahedron Adventures

Refuge Part Three -- Arches and Shingletown
Organizations and Neighborhoods of a Steel Age Fantasy d20 City

by Owen K.C. Stephens

In this final installment -- which we've visited twice before, we look at the middle class and merchant sections of Refuge.

Arches

Arches is the main merchant section of the city, and is characterized by wide, straight streets (big enough for a cart pulled by eight oxen to turn around) connected by narrow, meandering alleyways. The borough's name comes from the large stone arches found throughout the region, connected by rope systems and short, gated walls. These were originally supposed to support a system of catwalks for the Refuge Guard to patrol the area, but the engineering of the project was unsound. A previous Domant opted to connect the arches with much more reasonable walls, supporting them with ropes and pulleys to ensure they wouldn't collapse. Of course, if oxen were hooked to the ropes the arches could be brought down, allowing the city to throw numerous stone barricades in front on an invading army (though this has never been put to the test).

Arches is patrolled chiefly by the City Militia, though their primary duty is to ensure the wide streets don't get crowded by bender stalls and tents (though this is allowed on festival days, when residents often come out to sell a few crafts they've constructed since the last festival). Anyone found selling out of a wagon or trying to set up a temporary stall is fined and ejected. There are no such restrictions on wandering salesmen, resulting in a wide array of items carried on poles or portable racks and offered for sale by Criers.

Any reasonably common material can be found at a shop in Arches. Uncommon material may also be available at places such as Rat's Bits and Pieces (detailed below).

Criers

The Criers are common throughout Arches, both as simply announcers (of special offers, job opportunities, new laws, and even public threats between wealthy houses) and as wandering sellers of good kept on the body rather than in a wagon or stall. A Crier can be bought for a gp a day, though most must be hired at a Crier Stage, one of the many small platforms at which members of the Crier's Association gather when looking for work. Young men and women can become members of the Association for a small fee and, if their voices are loud and clear, make fair money for little labor.

They officially operate outside the Guild League system, and use that exclusion to act as fences, door-to-door salesmen, and deal brokers. The people of Refuge are used to seeing Criers everywhere, and thus give no thought to one being near a robbery or spotted after a break-in. Criers are next to invisible, and use that fact to run numerous minor scams. Those who do so successfully are brought in to the "inner circle" of the association, where they discover the Criers are part of the larger thieves' guild in refuge. They can carry goods anywhere without arousing suspicion, and are the most ignored when they draw attention to themselves by hollering about new tax laws, cheap meals at the Red Turnip Inn, or how Lord Thunsey plans to thrash Lord Mickles for an argument over someone's daughter. The very best are eventually brought into the inner circle of the criminal element, and learn the Criers are actually spies for the Domant, his eyes and ears among the common folk of Refuge.

Of course, not every Crier that is shown the secrets of the Association proves trustworthy. A newly enlightened

member is assured if he is unhappy with this turn of event, he can take a payment for his silence and leave Refuge in peace. The member is then followed and watched by those stealthier than himself; at the first hint of willingness to talk or run, the former member is killed. The Criers can brook no traitors, and consider their secret duties too important to let a threat live. The Domant does not use them as assassins, but many train in such skills to police their own numbers. Once the secret of the Criers is revealed to a member, the only escape from the group is death, though many are said to have "retired overseas" to deflect suspicions.

The Criers are ruled by Cedric Baker, an overweight and aging man whose voice can still be heard over nine blocks if he bellows at full force. Baker is a loyal agent of the Domant, and seeking a replacement he trusts to be just as loyal. He lives simply in a small office behind one of the Crier's Stages, satisfied in the security of knowing the Domant needs him rather than any material reward. Baker is also a sorcerer who focuses on spells of divination, a secret he keeps even from other trusted Criers. As a result, he has convinced most of the spies under him that there exists another organization that does nothing but watch over the Criers and report to Baker. This misdirection has saved Baker's life many times, as foes who penetrate the Criers waste time seeking this nonexistent group, giving Baker time to find them with divination magics.

Rat's Bits and Pieces

Found on the northern edge of Arches, Rat's Bits and Pieces is a ramshackle, stale-smelling, sprawling warehouse stuffed to the rafters with, well, junk. The walls, ceiling, shelves, and counters are stuffed with broken weapons, one-foot sections of rope, half-burned candles, desiccated spider corpses, perforated waterskins, ripped clothing, broken pottery, untanned hides, cracked barrels, rotting books, small animal skeletons, and scraps of paper with incomplete recipes and poems. For most people, it's all valueless.

For Rat, a short and balding man well past his prime, it's home.

Rat was a street urchin 25 years ago, when he happened to overhear a plot to poison the Domant. Being naturally stealthy, he managed to sneak into the Domant's palace and worn the sovereign. Surprised, but wary, the Domant held rat until he could ascertain the truth of the vagrant's claim. When the plot materialized, and was foiled, the Domant offered rat a boon. Having always desired a shop of his own, like those of the fat and happy merchant who drove him from their shops, Rat asked for a business in Arches. The Domant agreed, and gave him a property free of rent.

Rat, of course, had no business experience. He quickly went broke. So the Domant bailed him out. Many times. Eventually, the Domant just asked Rat to limit the speed at which he lost money, which Rat did by only buying things cheap. Very, very cheap. Soon, the B&P was the premiere place in Refuge to sell useless junk. Indeed, Rat buys almost anything, at one cp per ten pounds.

However, one man's trash is another's treasure. Craftsmen soon learned they could find raw materials in the B&P. Seamstresses got trim, buttons, and needles. A few spellcasters learned that any material component without a gp cost was likely on some shelf, somewhere. Slowly, Rat built up enough of a clientele he actually turned a profit, as his rent was free. Now two to three people can be found during any daylight hour, searching through the piles of refuse for some item too small for other businesses to worry about. (Anything with a price of 10 gp can be found in an hour with a DC 20 Search check. Such items are second-hand, with half the hardness and hit points of a new version and requiring an appropriate DC 10 Craft check to function properly.) Rat sells his junk for 1 sp per 5 pounds, and makes a tidy profit at that.

Rat is also a source of gossip and local information. Anyone buying from him more than once in a week gains a +4 circumstance bonus to any gather Information or Knowledge (local) check regarding Refuge. The sole exception is information clearly harmful to the Domant. The city's ruler can do no wrong in rat's eyes, and the shopkeeper has nothing to do with any question that seems designed to make trouble for Domant.

Shingletown

Located west of the Arches merchant district, Shingletown is home to the city's small, but growing, middle class. This is where smiths, merchants who own more than one shop, scribes, and master craftsmen live in relative peace and safety. The name of the area comes from the fact that while the buildings here are wood or a combination of wood-and-stone, their owners can afford to keep clay- or tile-shingled roofs above their heads. Shingled roofs are much better at keeping rain out of a building than the thatch common on lower-class homes in Refuge, but are significantly costlier to build and maintain. Tile shingles are common for shops throughout town, as the additional cost is justified by the protection it gives wares and working areas, but most commoners can't afford such a luxury for their homes. Conversely the very wealthy live in all-stone buildings with stone roofs, which is beyond the reach of the middle-class Shingletown dwellers.

The community of Shingletown is surprisingly tight-knit. Many of the residents have nothing in common but their economic status and physical proximity, but that's enough to encourage them to stand together on many political issues. The aldermen of Shingletown have lead the debate opposing sumptuary laws, inheritance dues, property taxes, trial-by-combat, and any restriction on what occupations young freeman may enter. While their successes have been modest, the fact the aldermen have been allowed to speak out against the existing system, and even occasionally get a law changed, is itself a sign of their growing influence.

Information Checks

- **DC 13:** The Refuge Guard never patrols here. Since it is funded by the nobility of the city, who see the freemen of Shingletown as dangerous upstarts, the Guard does nothing to stifle crime here. The Guard only enters Shingletown to arrest someone.
- **DC 15:** The City Militia has a very strong presence in Shingletown. Many of its senior watchmen are younger sons of Shingletown merchants, more loyal to their families and the neighborhood in general than the second-rate knights who officially command them.
- **DC 18:** The residents of Shingletown see the City Militia as their protectors, and thus are unwilling to act against them. Any excesses the Militia commits in Shingletown against nonresidents (either lower-class citizens from other neighborhoods or foreigners) is actively covered up by most of the residents of Shingletown. Any crime committed by the Militia against a noble or the agent of a noble is covered up if there is no evidence, but a watchman who gets himself in trouble with the nobles and leaves witnesses loyal to them around will be turned out by Shingletown (for the good of the community).
- **DC 25:** Only one thieves' guild, the Golden Mules, has any influence over Shingletown. They pose as a simple porter's guild, and gain the support of Shingletown residents by preventing other criminal organizations from moving in.

City Militia

The City Militia is a relatively recent addition to the military forces of Refuge. It was originally assembled over a generation ago by a small band of knights in the Refuge Guard through conscription, to bolster the city's forces in the face of impending pirate attack. The feared assault never came (many believe exactly because the Militia had been formed), but having a group of armed men who neither answered to the nobles of the Lower Court nor took the long training of a Refuge Guard knight turned out to be popular and useful.

The Militia Guard are seen by the common folk of Refuge as more evenhanded and honest than the refuge Guard, and seen by the Domant as less likely to back a major noble in a coup attempt. When the Lower Court refused to pay for the Militia after the pirate threat passed, the Guild League volunteered to do so. As a result, the City Militia became the primary patrolling force within the merchant districts of refuge, and has grown in numbers and power for 50 years.

To prevent the Lower Court from rebelling at the perceived loss of power, the Militia was assigned knights of the Guard as commanders early in its formation. This duty was seen by the knights as a form of punishment, and those connected to the richest and most powerful houses worked to avoid such assignment. Many knights from minor noble houses have come to prefer duty with the Militia, as it keeps them from dealing with the more stuck up members of the Refuge Guard, and the Militia has developed a tradition of loyalty to those who befriend them. More than one minor

noble family has been saved from hard times through beneficial contacts with merchant houses related to members of the Militia. While a few knights still try to get out of Militia command duty as quickly as possible, an increasing number see the Militia as the "true" military force of Refuge and are proud to serve in it.

The Militia is headquartered in a large building known as the Grand Barracks, or just the Grand, near the center of Shingletown. The Grand is among the biggest buildings in Refuge, but unlike the Domant's palace or the cathedrals, it is constructed primarily of wood. It serves as housing for active members of the Militia, storehouse for emergency food for the city, and training facility for the Militia and any citizen that wishes to learn how to operate the city's siege engines to aid in its defense. The training of personal combat is restricted to Militia members and their families, to discourage brawlers from training to be more effective troublemakers.

The City Militia is currently commanded by Sir Roland Fletcher, a senior knight who has served the organization for 20 years. Sir Roland has worked tirelessly to improve the quality of the Militia members, secure their status within the city, and weed slackers and malcontents from their ranks. In his efforts he has thrown out several less-than-enthusiastic knights belong to noble families more influential than his, embarrassing those families. This has increased tension between the Militia and the Refuge Guard. Sir Roland sees this an acceptable consequence, and secretly hopes the Guard push the rivalry far enough for the Domant to disband them. So far his loyal service to the city has earned Sir Roland the Domant's trust and protection, but when the current Domant dies the Lower Court may be emboldened to eliminate Sir Roland, and eventually the whole Militia.

The Golden Mules

The Golden Mules are the unquestioned, and unchallenged, lords of organized crime within Shingletown. Though they have tendrils in the lower-class boroughs as well, Shingletown is the bread and butter of the Mules, and they act quickly to crush any perceived threat to their control of the region, or threat to their income from it.

The Mules restrict their activities to actions taken against nonresidents, and charging outrageous fees for the transportation of anything into and out of the borough (starting at one gold piece, and going up by a silver per pound, per stop, though distance is ignored). The Mules allow residents to carry what they can by hand, but anyone trying to use an animal or cart to move things in and out of the borough is cornered and beaten. Since the Mules also guard against other criminal organizations working in Shingletown, the residents pay the Golden Mules' fees without complaint.

While residents of Shingletown are safe from the Mules' criminal actions, visitors to the area are not. Mules happily rob, blackmail, and even kill outsiders that happen to travel to Shingletown. They don't victimize outsiders without restriction -- after all, if Shingletown became an unpopular destination less money would flow in -- but they do act boldly when a major profit seems within reach. Newcomers to the city may be beaten and robbed at the edge of Shingletown, residents from elsewhere threatened for extortion money, and Refuge nobles lured into honeytraps or kidnapped for ransom. Wherever possible the Mules don't do their dirty work near the center of Shingletown, which helps deflect suspicion to other groups, but even so their presence and actions are well known to the various guards of the city.

For the most part, the Golden Mules also ignore members of the City Militia, which helps convince the militia to overlook some Mule operations, such as unlicensed brothels, dice games, usury, and the occasional mild beating of people behind in their payments. The Mules don't roll over for the Militia, however, and the Militia doesn't give the Mules a pass for major crimes. Even so, it's not unusual for an older brother to join the City Militia and a younger brother the Golden Mules.

The Golden Mules are currently led by Sharia Fess, the first woman to hold the position of guildmaster. She rose through the ranks of madams when younger, and moved into extortion and armed robbery when she realized she had to inspire both respect and fear within the guild to gain any more power. She became a member of the old guildmaster's inner circle, then rose to power when the Golden Mules suffered a major backlash from the Red Hawks and Refuge Guard over the unwise slaying of a Refuge knight. Fess managed to cement her hold over the Mules by promising the Red Hawks to reign in their excesses, a promise she intends to keep as long as she's publicly known. Fess also hopes

to fake her death some time in the next few years, and set up a shadow leader of the Mules. Then she would be free to engage the Mules in any activity that seemed profitable, and if the authorities became too upset Fess could sacrifice a figurehead leader to appease them.

Cities In Fog: Well-Walled Troy

"Of the true and famous Troy there have been no traces for ages: not a stone is left to certify where it stood. It was looked for to little purpose as long back as the time of Strabo: and Lucan, having mentioned that it had been in vain searched for in the time of Julius Caesar, concludes his narrative with this melancholy observation upon the fate of this celebrated city, that its very ruins were annihilated."
-- Robert Wood, *An Esssay on the Original Genius and Writings of Homer* (1769)

It's the first city of Western literature; the tale of Troy has quite possibly been around longer than any scripture in the world. Its descendants built Rome and London, and their scions fight their heroic wars in the Rose Bowl every winter. But for all that, what do we know of Troy? We think we see its topless towers clearly in the mind's eye, or their foundations firmly pinpointed on the chart of History -- but do we? Let's go looking, then, for Troy.

"And so great names are nothing more than nominal,
And love of glory's but an airy lust,
Too often in its fury overcoming all
Who would as 'twere identify their dust
From out the wide destruction, which, entombing all,
Leaves nothing till 'the coming of the just' --
Save change: I've stood upon Achilles' tomb,
And heard Troy doubted; time will doubt of Rome."
-- Lord Byron, *Don Juan* Canto IV, 101 (1820)

One begins, of course, with Homer, who would rather call the city "Ilios" than "Troia" -- he uses the former name exactly twice as often. Hence, the *Iliad* rather than the *Troiad.* Interestingly, Homer differentiates between Troy and Ilios -- only Ilios is "holy," for example, while only Troy is "deep-soiled." This has led some scholars to speculate that originally, the country was Troy and the city was Ilios. Or, actually, Wilios, since it originally took the digamma, as clever linguists can tell by examining the Homeric text. (This, by the way, is powerful evidence that the *Iliad* is at least partially based on a genuine Mycenaean epic -- the digamma was common in Mycenaean Greek, but obsolete by the time Homer sang, around 700 B.C., give or take a century.) So you can imagine the excitement when a deciphered Hittite treaty from 1270 B.C. or thereabouts mentions the "districts" of Wilusa and Taruisa, which pretty much have to be our holy Wilios and broad Troy. (Egyptian records list the "Drdny" as Hittite allies around 1300 B.C. -- Homer's Trojan "Dardanoi"?) As a bonus, a Linear B inscription from the ruins of the Mycenaean citadel at Pylos -- Nestor's city -- mentions "Toroja," in the context of a captive woman.

So we have something like Homer's names, carved into clay records right around the time of Homer's Trojan War, which Herodotos dates to 1250 B.C. (Other classical historians run the gamut from 1346 B.C. to 1127 B.C. When do modern historians date the Trojan War? Modern historians make little gulping noises and change the subject.) Where do those names come from? Quite literally, your guess is as good as mine. The Greek mythographers, of course, said that the names came from Ilos, the son of Tros, which solves precisely nothing. "Ilos" might be cognate with Greek *ilê,* "troop," or with *ili-,* the Illyrian root for "mud" (from the mud-brick buildings?), or with something entirely different. "Troia" could be cognate with *tri-,* since Troy's deepest (and hence earliest) layer features a [triple-branched](#) passage that once supplied water to the town from an [underground spring](#) cave. Other possibilities include the Hittite *taru* which means "timber" or "trees," or the Indo-European root **toru,* which means "churn-handle," but has connotations of something winding or twisted, such as the current through the Hellespont or the mazy alleys of Troy. Or the intestines, which are coincidentally *ileos* in Greek. (*Eileo-* connotes "twisted" or "winding".) And we might as well mention, to close the circle (*redan**truare,** in Latin), that a Babylonian term for entrails -- or for mazes, or both -- is *tirani.*

"Egypt? Woe is me! to think that hither I have sailed! . . . Can there be a man that hath the name of Zeus by the banks of Nile? The Zeus of heaven is only one, at any rate. Where is there a Sparta in the world save where Eurotas glides between his reedy banks? The name of Tyndareus is the name of one alone. Is there any land of the same name as

Lacedaemon or Troy? I know not what to say; for naturally there are many in the wide world that have the same names, cities and women too; there is nothing, then, to marvel at."
-- Menelaos, in *Helen* by Euripides (412 B.C.)

Now that we've gotten ourselves thoroughly twisted around linguistically, what can we do geographically? By the time Herodotos (if not Homer) wrote, there was no real question where Troy was -- it was at Ilion, the Aeolian colony planted at the Asiatic entrance to the Hellespont around 700 B.C. (For awhile, scholars thought the name "Ilios" might have come from "Aeolis," but the digamma seemingly disproved that notion.) Conquerors, pilgrims, and bards who visited the site all agreed, from Alexander the Great to the Emperor Constantine to Lord Byron. We have evidence that for at least nine centuries in the classical era women from Locris, to wipe out the stain of Ajax of Locris' blasphemy during the Trojan War (he dragged Cassandra out of the temple of Athena and raped her), traveled to Ilion to serve as scullery maids. Although most authorities believed that Ilion was the original Troy, a few mavericks (such as Strabo) placed it elsewhere on the plain, usually on a different hill, now called Bali Dagh. Slowly, however, they somehow convinced themselves that it was lost, all the same.

To be sure, Ilion (and to a lesser extent Bali Dagh) matched Homer's poem -- but that might have been because Homer (a local boy, from neighboring Ionia) might have matched his words to the site rather than the other way around. The "actual" Trojan War might have been fought, suggest a few scholars, at Teuthrania, well to the south of Ilion, where the pre-Homeric *Kypria* records a different contest of Achilles. (This, as it happens, coincides with a Hittite document complaining about the depredations of the "Ahhiwiya," quite likely the "Achaeans" of Homer.) Teuthrania is also convenient to the very large and impressive ancient city of Pergamon, which is intriguingly Homer's name for the citadel of Troy. Some scholars suspect that Homer put together a "greatest hits" epic, combining sieges and stories from all up and down the Anatolian coast into one ideal type. Another scholar claims that the "Troes" were actually a tribe in Thessaly near Aeolis, and the Aeolians (them again) took the names with them when they colonized Asia. The folklorist Rhys Carpenter went so far as to identify the historical Trojan War with the attack of the "Sea Peoples" on Egypt in 1200 B.C., an argument that founders somewhat on the fact that Egypt, unlike Troy, won that round.

But why let puling historical plausibility stop you? Theophile Cailleux identified Homer's "Danaoi" with the "Danaan," or Celts, and placed Troy in England, specifically atop the [Gogmagog Hills](#) near Cambridge. One Roberto Salinas Price discovered Ilium in Illyria (makes sense, no?), specifically in the town of Gabela on the Yugoslavian coast. Perhaps best of all, in *The Baltic Origins of Homer's Epic Tales,* nuclear engineer Felice Vinci notes that the battle over Achilles' armor spans two days, through the "dimly-lit night." Where do you have dim light at night? Why, in Scandinavia! (More specifically, in the evocatively named Toija, Finland -- the "r" having apparently vanished over the millennia.) After all, the Mycenaean warriors sure act all Viking-y, and it must be admitted that there's a lot of rain, wind, and snow in the *Iliad* for a war that's supposed to be happening in the sunny Aegean.

"The fragment of the Critias has given birth to a world-famous fiction, second only in importance to the tale of Troy and the legend of Arthur; and is said as a fact to have inspired some of the early navigators of the sixteenth century. This mythical tale, of which the subject was a history of the wars of the Athenians against the Island of Atlantis, is supposed to be founded upon an unfinished poem of Solon, to which it would have stood in the same relation as the writings of the logographers to the poems of Homer."
-- Benjamin Jowett, "Introduction to *The Republic* of Plato" (1892)

Of course, once you've gone that far, you might as well go whole hog -- why can't Troy be Sri Lanka? The *Ramayana,* which tells of Rama's war to recapture Sita from the king of Lanka, is full of no-doubt eerie parallels to the Helen legend, and the Vedic tribes who wrote it were just as obsessed with bulls and chariots as any of Homer's heroes. And if you, like some folks, think that "Lanka" sounds a lot like "[Atlantis,](#)" then it ties in nicely with Eberhard Zangger's theory -- Troy was Atlantis!

There are, it must be admitted, some attractive aspects to Zangger's notion. In *The Flood From Heaven,* he points out that both Troy and Atlantis are citadels holy to Poseidon, situated on well-watered plains with deep harbors. Both have mountains behind them. Both sit at the entrances to straits. We get around the vexed name question, since Tros and Ilos were descendants of the Titan Atlas -- which is to say, they were Atlantean. Better yet, both Troy and Atlantis have hot-and-cold twin springs, the only two such places in all the corpus of Greek lore. Both Troy and Atlantis

fought Hellenic confederacies, and lost. Intriguingly, Plato's history of Atlantis breaks off right where the Trojan War epic starts -- with Zeus calling a council of the gods to determine the fate of the city. And, of course, both Troy and Atlantis vanished.

"I am extremely disappointed at being obliged to give so small a plan of Troy; nay, I had wished to be able to make it a thousand times larger, but I value truth above everything."
-- Heinrich Schliemann, *Troy and Its Remains* (1875)

But hold on a second, I can hear you cry. Didn't Heinrich Schliemann quite noisily "discover" Troy, right where the ancients said it was, buried under the Greek city of Ilion? Well, yes and no. Absolutely, Schliemann dug up a Bronze Age fortress -- or, technically, seven Bronze Age fortresses and two Classical-era towns -- from the hill of Hisarlik in northwestern Turkey, right where Ilion had been. Most archaeologists, or at least those of a romantic bent, are willing to identify "Homeric Troy" with either Troy Vih, a powerful citadel damaged by an earthquake, and maybe a fire, around 1280 B.C., or Troy VIIa, a much poorer city, definitely burnt around 1190 B.C. But it's worth reiterating that there is absolutely no hard evidence for a siege of either, and not a shard of proof that Hisarlik's hill forts were Troy, or even Wilusa. And even Schliemann (who thought Homer's Troy was Troy II, burnt in 2200 B.C. by other people entirely) recognized that all his Hisarliks were too small to be "wide-wayed Ilios," supporting populations in the hundreds at best, although he did his best to bury that truth in persiflage and flamboyance. Schliemann's most recent inheritor and defender, Manfred Korfmann, maintained that he had discovered a defensive wall around the "lower town" that vastly increases Troy VIh's size. Other archaeologists note dryly that this "wall" more resembles a drainage ditch, and was discovered already anyway by Carl Blegen in 1938.

"They said Achilles in the darkness stirred . . .
And Priam and his fifty sons
Wake all amazed, and hear the guns,
And shake for Troy again."
-- fragmentary poem by Rupert Brooke, written while sailing to Gallipoli, shortly before his death (1915)

So even Schliemann's Troy, the Troy of the archaeologists, is bisociated. Possible dates for Troy VI and Troy VII overlap by as much as fifty years either way; potsherds that clearly belong in the 9th century turn up *under* undisturbed buildings in Troy VIIb, dated closer to 1200 B.C. Homer's Troy is allied with the Phrygians, who don't appear in history until four centuries later, and the word of Homer himself has been dated anywhere from 950 B.C. (well before the Phrygians, as it happens) to four hundred years later. The *Iliad* may not have taken final form for another two centuries, or even longer -- the oldest text of Homer we have only goes back to the 10th century A.D. This kind of thing gives off eerie echoes of A.T. Fomenko's theory that the Trojan War is merely a recension of medieval events like the Fourth Crusade (when, as it happened, the Venetians looted that manuscript of Homer), or vice versa. Suddenly we're back in the twisting, winding entrails of time, wrapped around the hollow history touched off by the burning of Ilios' topless towers and the breaching of its god-built walls.

Troy could only be taken by guile, never by force. By oracular decree, Odysseus must first steal the Palladium, Troy's sacred goddess-stone, a baetyl that fell from heaven; and then he must devise the ruse of the Trojan Horse. In other versions of the myth, it's Ajax of Locris who steals the Palladium, and this is the blasphemy that enslaves the daughters of Locris. Ajax, you'll be interested to know, is the son of Oileos -- Wilios? Again, we're twisted around to where we started. Troy cannot even be approached directly; in the *Kypria,* the Greeks accidentally besiege Teuthrania at first and cannot find the way to Ilion. Finally an oracle reveals that only Telephos -- a wounded captive from Teuthrania -- can guide the fleet to Ilion, but Achilles must solve a riddle and heal Telephos with his spear. (Shades of the Fisher King!) The Achaean heroes have just as much trouble extricating themselves from Troy -- Menelaos winds up in Egypt, and Odysseus wanders for 20 years. Little wonder that "Troy-town" was also used in the Renaissance as a synonym for the Labyrinth of Crete, which as we've seen was guarded by yet another enigmatic goddess, with her own eccentric archaeologist-hierophant. Schliemann planned to excavate Knossos himself, but died before he could buy the land.

"Schliemann had a morbid fascination with graveyards; in his diaries are repeated references to corpses and burial sites."

-- Caroline Moorhead, *Lost and Found: The 9,000 Treasures of Troy* (1994)

In other words, Schliemann (and his successors) found what he was already looking for. In that spirit, we can excavate Schliemann's life for all sorts of weirdness. To begin with, he's simply lousy with Sophies and Sophias -- his stepmother, his father's maid (and lover), and his cousin, whom he pursued romantically. He attempted to court yet another Sophie in Russia in 1846, and finally married the beautiful, naïve niece of a Greek Archbishop, Sophia Engastromenos, in 1869. (He was patronized by Queen Sophie of the Netherlands, to boot.) All of this calls to mind the legend of Simon Magus, who discovers the reincarnated Helen of Troy -- the avatar of *Sophia,* the principle of Wisdom -- in a brothel, and marries her.

As a youth, Schliemann also had what sounds very much like tuberculosis, spitting blood so badly that he could not work in shops. In desperation, he took passage on the ship *Dorothea* (his mother's name) for Colombia. The ship was wrecked in a storm, and Schliemann (shades of Odysseus) was the only survivor. Weirdly, his tuberculosis was miraculously cured. Also unusually (for a shipwreck survivor, at any rate) Schliemann became a sudden addict of seawater baths, and kept up the habit for the rest of his life. He did have another brush with tuberculosis; he took his consumptive servant Pelops to Egypt with him in 1887. Pelops (named by Schliemann for the son of Tantalus, sacrificed to the gods) died, unfortunately. When Schliemann himself died, on the day after Christmas 1890, his wife Sophia used much of his vast fortune to endow tuberculosis sanitariums.

We can draw the threads together -- Schliemann somehow attracts a Lamia, a [vampire spirit](). He shakes it off in the wreck of the *Dorothea,* and like Byron communes less dangerously with it at sea. But he has the thirst now -- he searches for the avatar of Sophia, and haunts graveyards. He is drawn to Homeric Greece, as if by the song of the [Sirens](). (Does he hear them while bathing at sea? Is that why he has life-long pains in his ears?) In his first Greek dig, on Odysseus' Ithaka in July 1868, he illegally excavates a palace and "accidentally" destroys fifteen burial urns, covering himself with the potent dust of ages. He also finds a bust of Helen of Troy; he redoubles his search for Sophia. He finds her in 1869, and at Hisarlik in April 1870 he again finds a vase with "human ashes." He has his new patroness, not Lamia but Athene Glauxopis, "[Owl-Eyed Athene]()," as he translates Homer. Suddenly, Schliemann "discovers" Troy, digging it up in plain sight, piercing clouds of seemingly willful blindness. He pulls out the "Treasure of Priam," and photographs Sophia in the golden regalia, which has no clear provenance. Perhaps this offends, or perhaps his excavations have exposed too much. He begins hanging pictures of Jesus on the walls of Troy "to discourage looters" -- and in 1887, he buys more time from the Lamia by sacrificing Pelops in the Egyptian desert. He digs up weird [owl-woman]() hybrid statues in the wasteland ("I shall make of them," saith the Lord in Isaiah 34, "a court for owls.") and by 1889 is openly admitting to visions of Athene. He plans to dig out the goddess at Knossos, or to excavate Atlantis on the Canary Islands, but dies he dies on Yule, his ears choked with anomalous bony growths, having opened -- but far from resolved -- the conundrum of Troy.

Fun Shui

for *GURPS*

by Peter V. Dell'Orto

"the more ridiculous the stunt, the more likely it is to succeed; the more mundane the task, the more likely it is to fail. Jackie Chan's characters can happily ride a 200-foot banner down to earth safely, but will set fire to a friend's house while making a pot of tea."
--Kyle "JimBob" Schuant, on *forums.sjgames.com*

In certain genres, usually action-comedy movies, dangerous stunts like jumping a motorcycle onto a moving train *never* fail, but mundane circumstances with potentially comic outcomes often fail. A fighter will get beaten up by an old woman with an umbrella, but parry every single blow from the evil master's henchmen with ease. Yet the old woman is no match for even one henchman. Why does this happen? Simply put, because the consequences of one fight -- losing to the old woman with her umbrella -- are humorous. They may advance the plot by having the hero kicked out his school because of the humiliation, or look silly in front of the girl he wants to impress, or whatever! The consequences of the other fight, losing to the evil master's henchmen, is disastrous -- evil wins the day *and* the hero looks foolish and weak in the face of opponents he should roundly trounce. This applies to trivial situations as well -- when the kung fu student has to clean his master's room, he will trip over every object and send priceless artifacts tumbling. But that same student will flawlessly pull off the Seven Steps of the Serpent to hop from fence post to fence post to save a falling heroine!

There are two broad categories of ridiculous actions -- cinematic stunts and silly stunts. Cinematic stunts are crazy stunts unlikely to succeed in reality -- not without multiple out-takes and handy safety crews -- yet which succeed in the movies because the hero (or sometimes villain) is cool enough to pull them off. Silly stunts are exactly that -- silly. These stunts shouldn't succeed, yet do because they make the scene funny either through their ridiculous success or ridiculous failure.

Some games solve this problem with Hero Points -- they give the characters a pool of points to spend to influence the results of tasks. PCs will expend these to succeed in difficult stunts. But even the best hero point systems can encourage hoarding, and force the player to guess which tasks are the "big ones" worth blowing a wad of hero points on. No one wants to spend their whole stash only to find out this was the tune-up stunt, not the climactic battle! One additional problem for comedic games is that there is no corresponding negative hero points which make mundane tasks -- ones with potentially comedic or plot-advancing results from failing -- more difficult.

The focus of this article is on *GURPS Fourth Edition,* but GMs of other systems or of earlier editions can use its ideas to transform their own game's bonus/penalty situations. The goal of these suggestions is a fun game -- not a difficult challenge. Massive bonuses for ridiculous stunts will mean they will usually succeed. Thus, the challenge is not succeeding at a hard task, it's coming up with a way to find the most difficult tasks and execute them. GMs rewarding character points based on the challenge should instead reward it based on using the most appropriate genre methods to succeed. Merely succeeding or failing is not the point -- you've got to do it with style!

Reversed Penalties

Pages 345 & 346 of the *GURPS Basic Set* list bonuses and penalties appropriate to situations based on their difficulty. For these types of games, reverse the penalties; in other words, multiply the listed penalty by -1. So a 10 penalty (disastrously bad circumstances, like clearing a jammed gun while dangling upside down from a rope from a helicopter by your ankle in the rain) becomes (-1 × -10)=+10, making even a default Guns roll work at DX+6!

Consequences of failure is the determining factor in whether a "difficult" situation should warrant a bonus, or if an

"easy" situation should warrant a bonus. If the possible failure is *comedic* or *plot-advancing,* but otherwise doesn't cause significant harm to the character, what would normally be a bonus will be a penalty.

Actions do not have to be physical -- this explains the "sudden insight" that allows breaking a code without any access to computers (or even the code!) or how movie hackers can spend hours tweaking their computers but only seconds to crack the security of top-secret establishments. This also explains why characters can solve complex riddles while overlooking the fact that their suspiciously helpful new ally's name is an anagram of their enemy's -- deciphering Cretan Linear B to find out where the McGuffin is buried is at +10, but turning "Recnam Ecron" into "Necromancer" is at -10!

If the consequences are "Do this complex task or you die!" you get a massive bonus, encouraging people to swing on chandeliers or toss poor Maggie Cheung Man-Yuk out the window to slide down a cloth to the ground. Truly insane stuff should cap out near the +10 you'd get in a realistic game for utterly trivial activities done in ideal circumstances. So jumping a motorcycle onto a moving train is *easier* than riding down the street on a clear day with no traffic.

If the consequences are "Do this trivial task or you fail with humorous consequences!" you get a massive penalty to the roll. You'll likely fail. The -10 you'd get for disastrous circumstances is appropriate for the easiest activities, done in circumstances where failing can be much more entertaining than succeeding. *Every* trivial task is not subject to this penalty -- that would rapidly derail a game and remove any semblance of humor. Only tasks with humorous plot-significant consequences will get this. Walking down the street isn't penalized. Walking down the street with Master's antique teapot might be. Walking down the street with Master's antique teapot, which he doesn't know you've borrowed, when the Master is watching you, *is.*

Reward both appropriately in-game and out of game (bonus character points, spotlight time, in-game benefits) and you shouldn't have too many problems getting people to go along. Ideally, if you reward appropriately, you'll get PCs who are far more likely to try crazy stuff in combat or during adventures, but who get more silly goofiness outside of dangerous circumstances.

There are two ways to implement this.

GM Control

Under this system, the GM simply sets penalties and bonuses for tasks. Players may take extra risks to ensure a better chance of success, but generally the GM makes the determination. There is no accumulation of penalties or bonuses -- especially hard actions get a bonus, especially easy ones get a penalty, depending on how the GM sees the consequences and the difficulty. The reward for attempting dangerous stunts is a bonus, and you look cool if you succeed! Consistently attempting cool and appropriate stunts during a game is *definitely* good roleplaying. GMs should look at page 498 of the ***Basic Set*** for appropriate rewards.

Pros: The upside to this approach is that it is simple, easy to implement, and minimizes attempts by players at working the system by making their own task more difficult -- thus making them more likely to succeed.

Cons: The downside is that the weight of deciding what is appropriate falls squarely on the GM. Another downside is that the players do not get input on what would make a scene especially interesting or a stunt particularly impressive.

Bonus Pool Bidding

An alternative to GM control is a Bonus Pool Bidding System. Instead of the GM assigning penalties to actions based simply on their relative difficulty and potential consequences, the player bids up difficulty on mundane situations, in order to build up bonus points to later take penalties. This is essentially a hero point system, but where hero points are *only* accumulated by making other situations harder!

Players *bid* up the difficult on situations. The GM will state the base penalties or bonuses for a situation, reversed as

above. Then the PC can attempt to bid up the penalty on situations by describing possible bad consequences for their actions. For example, Jackie is riding his two-seater bike with his NPC girlfriend Maggie when they suddenly turn the corner and down a steep flight of stairs! In a dangerous action sequence, this would be worth a bonus. In a non-combat situation, it's a penalty. Jackie's player says "I bump down the stairs terrifically fast, and I may lose control and send Maggie flying over my head into a pillow-maker's big feather pile, mussing up her new dress!" The GM thinks it over and says "Okay, that's fine -- it's worth a -4 on your Bicycling roll. Roll for it." Succeed or fail, Jackie has earned 4 points for this action.

For each -1 taken by a player, he gets a +1 that can be used later that session (or in later sessions) in a difficult situation. These points accumulate and are separable. A PC who takes a -4 on one action, a -5 on another, and three -2s will have 4+5+2+2+2=15 points in his Bonus Pool to use for bonuses later. They can be used for a single +15 to a roll (!) or 15 +1s, or any combination totaling 15. As points are used, mark them off -- totals may go up and down rapidly in a game session.

When a situation arises, the PC will describe the extra difficulties (for bonuses) or potentially plot- or genre-friendly consequences for failure. These *must* be roleplayed. "I take a +5 to my Climbing roll and +2 on my ST roll" is *not* acceptable, while "I hop from flaming ladder rung to flaming ladder rung with both feet and one hand, while my other hand holds onto my Dependent! I take a +5 to climbing and a +2 to ST." The GM can veto or modify a bonus or penalty to fit the circumstances. A task may be too trivial or the justification by the PC too thin to be worth a big bonus.

Pros: One positive benefit of this approach is it makes players work to fit their actions into the genre. Another is that the GM is not the sole arbiter of difficulty -- the PCs will actively try to make their own mundane life more complicated to earn points, and pour in exciting details in dangerous situations to justify spending their points.

Cons: One downside is that it gives more rewards to good roleplayers, and may leave inexperienced or hesitant players in the dust. Those who "get it" will reap lots of rewards (and many pratfalls) while those who do not will have to depend on the luck of the dice. Another downside is that players may still seek to "game" the system, by ensuring as many goofy problems as they can imagine occur so they can get lots of points to win the big fights. This may or may not suit the genre -- for kung-fu comedies this is ideal, but for more serious games or pseudo-gritty action movies, it may make the game too silly and lose its edge.

Variants

The above methods can be tuned to fit a particular campaign. These are only a few starting suggestions. GMs are strongly encouraged to make up more to fit the genre they are playing in.

Restriction: Skilled Only: You *must* have the skill to get these benefits. Default use doesn't count, but even a single point (or half point under the *Third Edition*) is enough to activate these rules.

Restriction: Heroes & Villains Only: Only PCs and plot-critical NPCs -- often major villains, allies of the PCs, and comic foils of no allegiance -- get the benefit of these rules. Flunkies and bystanders use the normal system. The hero gets a +5 for jumping over the rack of sharp knives, but the pursuing henchmen get the normal -5 . . . making it very likely he'll succeed and his pursuers will crash into the rack, losing ground in the chase.

Restriction: Non-combat skills Only: Only non-combat skills get the benefit of these rules. Combat skills are unaffected. This encourages high-skilled fighters to fight like they would under realistic conditions, while still allowing for crazy stunts both in and out of combat. PCs won't be able to get a bonus for eye shots and massive Deceptive Attacks, but they *will* be able to slide down banisters or run across a pool by stepping on a series of swimmer's heads with relative ease.

Two Heads Are Better Than One: If two or more characters are affected, the penalties or bonuses are *additive.* Apply the highest penalty or bonus, and for each additional character, add half again (round *down*). For example, Jackie throws Maggie out the window for Sammo to catch her. Jackie has a +4, Maggie also a +4, while Sammo's task is

trivial (and failure to catch her would be very funny!) so he is at -6. Jackie throws at a +6 (+4, half of +4) and Sammo catches at a -6 + 6 or a 0. Because his friends had such a hard task, his is easier!

Double or Nothing: If a PC takes a penalty on a trivial task, he can *choose to fail* instead of rolling. The task automatically fails, with the most comic results the GM or players can think off. Treat this as a critical failure, but without actual serious consequences. Any Bonus Pool points earned from this action are *doubled.* However, as a balance, if the PC takes a penalty and succeeds in his task, no Bonus Pool points are earned.

Important Notes

In the movies, the characters are usually unaware they are *in* a movie. They do not know that it is safer to slide down a 200-foot banner or swing from chandelier than it is to ride a bike to work or start a campfire. Players in an RPG are extremely aware of the game rules. The players in an RPG are like the actors in a movie -- while Jackie Chan's character doesn't know the modifiers are reversed, while Jackie Chan the *actor* does. Because the *characters* do not know how the universe works, they believe that more dangerous tasks will be harder and more trivial tasks easier. Players who can separate their player knowledge from character knowledge will mesh well with this system. Players who have difficulty may do better with the Bonus Point Bidding Pool, where their out-of-game knowledge of the rules must be parleyed into in-game benefits with agreement from the GM, not just abused for bonuses or penalties.

GMs should take care PCs aren't working the system instead of using it to make the game more fun. If the player says "I'm on fire and they're shooting at me? Well, I'll do cartwheels across the floor, grab the rope with one hand in mid-wheel, and swing across the room through the window and into the water to put it out!" he gets a +8 to +10 to the appropriate rolls. If he says "I'm trying to make tea in a totally unimportant scene? I'll do cartwheels around while making it!" he gets a -10, because he's being needlessly silly and there is no serious consequences. He's probably only going to get a flat roll (if that) if there are no possibilities of humor or actual injury. And if there *are* . . . that -10 may ensure he gets it.

Natasha Fatale: Boris, is Moose you said you killed in previous episode?
Boris Badenov: Look, it's his show. If he wants to be hard to kill, let him.
--The Bullwinkle Show

Of course, in some movies and television shows -- such as *Last Action Hero* or *The Adventures of Rocky & Bullwinkle* -- one or more characters are aware of some of the rules of the universe. The villains may know they're the villains and must lose. This "fourth wall" breaking is useful for certain games -- generally ones with comic overtones, although the scenario is possible in other games as well. PCs forced into a "artificial reality" setting may realize the rules have changed and be able to take advantage -- this makes a good "change of pace" for games with normal, non-reversed modifiers.

This type of system requires good GM control and emphasis on consequences. Simply reversing penalties for situations means players will never do anything the easy way. No one will simply drive to work or make a pot of tea; they'll drive to work backwards blindfolded or make tea while standing on their heads on the counter. This will rapidly lead to a *very* silly game. This may be exactly what the GM and Players are looking for!

Way of the Exploding Grid

A Mystic Order for the *Diana, Warrior Princess* RPG

By Marcus L. Rowland

"Look at the chest," said frontier law-woman and medic Billie 'Doc' Holliday, "the placement of the wounds is accurate to a fraction of an inch. A perfect nine by nine grid, made by a weapon with a narrow curved tip about three inches long."

"Couldn't he have fallen on something that had a lot of spikes sticking out?" asked Diana.

"The wounds weren't made simultaneously," said Billie. "If you look at the holes in his shirt, it's obvious that he moved between one blow and the next. I'd have to say that all 81 wounds were made one after another, with a sharpened finger-nail."

"That can only mean one thing," said Diana, staring at the corpse. "He was killed by a Sudoku master . . ."

Sudoku (more properly Su-Doku, the "way of the exploding grid") is an ancient philosophy from the Mysterious East (Boston). It includes elements of meditation and numerology, and a martial arts tradition based on precise finger thrusts and blows to nerve clusters. Backing everything is a belief that events follow laws which can be understood and predicted . . . essentially, the triumph of law over chaos.

The most important element of Sudoku is an arcane numerological fortune-telling system. This involves entering a meditative trance, then putting numbered tiles onto a nine-by-nine grid, typically a board made of wood or marble, although the same techniques can be applied to a grid that's ruled on paper or drawn in the dust with a stick; the sequence in which the numbers fit, the order in which they are added to the board, and their location on the grid can somehow be used to generate insights into the future. The techniques of Sudoku meditation are a secret, revealed only to initiates, who refer cryptically to things like "the paradox of the excluded number," "the garden of forking paths," and "eliminating the extraneous," but never actually explain things in a way that an outsider will understand. Even the most basic Sudoku training requires several months of study. Successful meditation can give an insight into the past or future, and possibly a vision of things that would otherwise be unknown. It takes considerable time, from a few minutes to several days depending on the nature of the prediction and the psychic talent of the initiate, and is usually accompanied by tea-drinking, chanting, and the like.

One of the methods used to achieve the trance state is a form of ritual exercise in which the initiate moves through a series of 81 steps and bodily positions of increasing difficulty, on a floor mat ruled out in a nine-by-nine grid. Somehow this has evolved into a martial arts style, combining deadly finger-thrusts and blows to pressure points and intricate dance-like maneuvers. Initiates can often be recognized by their elongated fingernails. Even a relative beginner will usually have at least one long nail, usually the index finger of their dominant hand; masters may have several elongated nails. The length and number of long nails can be a clue to the ability of the initiate; a single nail a half-inch or so long is the sign of a novice or a relatively inexperienced initiate, while several

three or four inch talons suggest a master. Anything much longer is generally considered to be counter-productive ostentation. These signs can be deceptive, of course; a master might trim her nails as a disguise, accepting that her blows will do less damage in order to go unrecognized, or a novice (or imposter) might use false nails to pose as a master, assuming that nobody will dare to call his bluff and fight him. Some initiates also learn to use Sudoku boards and tiles as weapons, but a real weapon is more likely to be effective.

Members of the order are typically known by their rank and surname. At higher levels a particularly auspicious combination of numbers may also be used. For example, "Novice Goldberg," "Student Chang," "Initiate Singh," "Five-nail Master 4578 Jenkins."

Initiates of the martial art train in dojos whose floors are marked out with the traditional nine-by-nine grid and (apparently) random numbers chalked on some of the squares, and shout the numbers as they leap from square to square, performing martial arts maneuvers appropriate to the numerology of the sequence of squares, each maneuver adding another number to the square. This technique can be used as another way to generate the number sequences used for Sudoku prediction, though it requires someone to take notes. One consequence of this form of training is that initiates often shout out numbers and the names of combat maneuvers as they fight; for example "14 -- crouching weasel! 692 -- rabid coypu!" It's a hard habit to break, and means that when initiates fight they often seem to predict each other's moves by extrapolating the next numbers of the sequence.

It's important to realize that not all Sudoku initiates are martial artists; some of the most renowned seers of the order are infirm, or have no interest in combat techniques, and limit themselves to the "pure" numerological method. They are most likely to be encountered in or near the order's schools. They are the order's main source of revenue, selling their predictive services to anyone who can afford a steep hourly fee. Initiates found elsewhere are nearly always martial artists, if only for self-defense.

One interesting and rarely-mentioned use for Sudoku training is in cryptography; once even a few numbers and their positions are known the entire grid can be completed, and the rules of Sudoku prediction guarantee that there will be only one outcome. If you know the key to decoding the resulting grid you can send incomplete grids, or the information needed to create them, as a very compact code message which in turn creates a larger message. Such grids are useless for genuine prediction, of course, since the results are predetermined by their creators. This method is mainly used to send messages between the order's schools, but could have wider applications.

Game Stuff

For **Diana, Warrior Princess,** Sudoku training is a major event in a character's life, and must be included in his back story. Sudoku masters can't easily have any other occupation; the mental exercises, meditation, and martial arts training required to maintain mastery are a full-time job. Less committed initiates might combine the training with other forms of mysticism or martial art, or have some other way of earning a living.

"Pure" Sudoku prediction is a use of Mystic Power, and all initiates must have at least one point in this attribute. It can be combined with Thinking (and possibly other attributes such as Luck) but more successes will be required for any prediction. The greater the number of successes, the more accurate the prediction is likely to be, but ultimately the outcome is always determined by the referee.

The ritual exercises and combat prediction techniques again require the use of Mystic Power, but it can be combined with attributes such as Athlete or Speed and (of course) Martial Arts.

The martial art uses attacks to pressure points, usually delivered by a sharp prod of an extended finger. All attacks require the use of the Martial Arts attribute, which can be combined with Strength, Speed, or Mystic Power. Initiates keep at least one finger nail abnormally long. The length of the longest nail (in inches) or the number of extra-long nails is the number of extra dice added to an otherwise unarmed Martial Arts attack, to a maximum of +4 or Martial Arts, whichever is *lower*. For example, if an initiate has Martial Arts [3] and grows a 3" fingernail or three 1" fingernails there is a +3 bonus; growing longer nails, or more long nails, does not give a further bonus. Even if Martial Arts exceeds 4 the maximum bonus is +4. Unkind referees may occasionally wish to impose penalties on attributes

requiring precision hand work, such as Art or Thief, if a character has extra-long nails. They also make disguise very difficult.

Use Marksmanship to throw a sudoku board; it acts like a Frisbee with sharp corners, no bonus for a wooden board, +1 for a marble board. The tiles can be thrown or dropped as a tripping hazard, but give no bonuses to Marksmanship or Martial Arts.

Sudoku cryptography uses Thinking and/or the Computers attribute; Mystic Power cannot be used to decode messages. Computers cannot be used for normal Sudoku predictions.

Roleplaying Suggestions

- A Sudoku initiate makes some predictions about one of the characters, describing a series of unlikely events culminating in his or her death. After the first incident the character goes to great lengths to evade fate, but seems to be unable to shake off destiny. Is death really certain, or is someone giving fate and the prediction a helping hand?
- After years of study one of the adventurers is considered ready to graduate from the rank of "novice" to "initiate," if he can pass a few simple tests; nothing too arduous, and it's years since someone was actually killed by them. However, for some reason the Master of the local school has taken a particular dislike to the student, has only grudgingly agreed to administer the tests, and seems determined to find reasons to fail him. Can the other adventurers lend a hand without accusations of cheating?
- While visiting a Sudoku school the adventurers stumble into a secluded hall where a group of extremely old masters, all with several four-inch fingernails, are practicing martial arts on a large grid, much bigger than nine-by-nine, using hitherto-unseen moves such as "C3B -- Leaping lizard!" while a younger initiate scuttles after them and chalks numbers and letters into the squares. Before the adventurers can interrupt or ask questions their guide catches up with them and steers them back into the main temple. Once they are out of earshot the guide explains that they are "dancing the 16-fold path to enlightenment," an extremely advanced exercise. He makes it sound almost routine... but there is an echo of fear in his voice, and it's obvious that he's hiding something. If they're using the ritual to predict something, why isn't the usual nine-by-nine grid sufficient? And why is the guide so scared?
- The Sudoko board and tiles belonging to the legendary Nine-Nail Master 7162534 Cohen were lost several hundred years ago, but an antiques dealer in the legendary desert Bazaar of E'Bai claims to have found them, and is offering them for sale at what promises to be an exorbitantly high price. The auction is to take place in less than a week; the adventurers are hired to undertake the perilous journey to E'Bai, and recover these relicts at all costs if they are genuine. Of course "at all costs" doesn't actually mean that they're being given much money to play with. But there may be other, less legal means to recover them. Naturally there are problems, not least the sorcerer lords of E'Bai who control the market and take a hard line on theft.
- A famous Sudoku Master meets the adventurers and decides to join them, whether they want him or not. He's strong, full of ancient wisdom, and a combat monster . . . but he's senile and just a little absent-minded, to the point where he sometimes has trouble remembering who he's supposed to be fighting. As for predictions, forget it; he can't stay focused long enough to complete even the simplest grid. But he can undoubtedly beat any of the other adventurers in an instant; how are they going to tell him that he's unwelcome? Or are they prepared to keep him around and accept the collateral damage, which may eventually include friendly casualties?

End Notes

If you were wondering, the word Sudoku actually means "numbers singly" in Japanese. The name is a registered trademark of puzzle publisher Nikoli Co. Ltd in Japan. This type of puzzle was actually invented by Howard Garns, an American freelance puzzle constructor, in 1979. Source [Wikipedia](#).

Special thanks to Robert Prior and Michael J. Lowrey for some excellent suggestions.

Istvan Roja, Vampire Vampire Hunter Hunter

for *GURPS*

by James L. Cambias

Istvan Roja has been a vampire for more than 400 years, and is perfectly content with his condition. As far as he is concerned, it is perfectly natural and right that he and other vampires prey on humans. But there are some humans who just won't accept that arrangement. They go after vampires with fire, sharpened stakes, and holy water. The very idea of humans perverting the natural order this way angers Istvan, and he has taken up a personal campaign of extermination aimed at vampire-hunters.

Roja was a Transylvanian baron who lived in the 16th century. He was killed by a vampire while out hunting in the deep forests of his land, and struggled back home a few days later as a vampire himself. Roja had no immediate family, and his servants were either loyal or terrified of him, so for several years he was able to hide his condition and retain his lands and wealth.

But rumors of an "unliving lord" reached the ears of a wandering vampire-hunting priest who sought out Roja and tried to expose him. The vampire lord laughed off the accusations at first, but as pressure from other nobles mounted, he finally had to flee his castle and go into hiding with as much treasure as he could carry. When the vampire-hunter tried to track him down, Roja killed him.

Since then, Roja has done his best to destroy all those who would hunt vampires. He studied sorcery at the dreaded Scholomance in the Carpathian mountains above Herrenstadt. He learned to change identity and adapt (grudgingly) to a changing world. And he learned to hunt vampire hunters very effectively.

Istvan Roja   *560 points*

A handsome, regal-looking man with very pale skin and very sharp teeth. He wears his dark hair long, and dresses in very expensive black suits.

ST 16 [60]
DX 13 [60]
IQ 13 [60]
HT 12 [20]

Dmg. 1d+1 thr, 2d+2 swing
BL 51
HP 20 [8]
Will 16 [15]
Per 16 [15]
FP 15 [9]
Basic Speed 7 [15]
Basic Move 7

Languages: Hungarian (native), Latin (accented) [2], German (accented) [2], Romanian (accented) [2], Polish (accented) [2], French (accented) [2], English (accented) [2].

Wealth (Very Wealthy) [30], Independent Income 5 [5]

Reputation (Defender of Vampires, +3 among vampires and their kindred, all the time) [5]

Status 3 [15]

Advantages

Alternate Forms (Bat, Wolf) [30]
Alternate Identity (Illegal) [15]
Doesn't Breathe [20]
Dominance [20]
Combat Reflexes [15]
Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]
Injury Tolerance (Unliving) [20]
Insubstantiability (costs 2 FP) [72]
Language Talent [10]
Magery 2 (Dark-Aspected) [13]
Night Vision 5 [5]
Silence 2 [10]
Speak With Animals (Wolves and bats) [10]
Unaging [15]
Unkillable 2 (Achilles' Heel: Wood) [50]
Vampiric Bite [30]

Disadvantages

Dependency (Coffin with native soil; Daily) [-60]
Divine Curse (Cannot enter dwelling unless invited) [-10]
Draining (Human blood) [-10]
Dread (Garlic) [-10]
Dread (Religious Symbols; 5 yards) [-14]
Dread (Running Water) [-20]
Intolerance (humans) [-10]
Secret (vampire) [-30]
Sense of Duty (vampires) [-10]
Supernatural Features (No body heat*, No reflection, Pallor*) [-16]
Uncontrollable Appetite (12) (Human blood) [-15]
Unhealing (Partial) [-20]
Weakness (Sunlight: 1d/minute) [-60]

Quirks

Behaves honorably to other vampires, Dislikes TL5 or later tech, Vengeful [-3]

Skills

Acting-13 [2], Alchemy/TL4-12 [4], Brawling-14 [2], Broadsword-15 [8], Climbing-14 [4], Cloak-14 [4], Disguise/TL4-14 [4], Fast-Draw-14 (Sword) [2], Games-14 (Chess) [2], Guns/TL6-14 (Pistol) [2], Hidden Lore-14 (Undead) [4], History-12 (Transylvania) [2], Hypnotism-15 [12], Intimidation-16 [2], Knife-16 [8], Leadership-13 [2], Main-Gauche-12 [0], Occultism-15 [8], Parry Missile Weapon-14 [8], Riding-14 (Horse) [4], Savoir-Faire-13 [1], Stealth-16 [12], Tactics-14 [8], Tracking-15 [1], Traps/TL4-14 [4].

Spells

Bravery-13 [1], Command Spirit-15 [4], Daze-13 [1], Death Vision-13 [1], Divination-15 (Gastromancy) [4], Emotion Control-13 [1], Fascinate-15 [4], Fear-13 [1], Foolishness-13 [1], Forgetfulness-13 [1], Loyalty-13 [1], Permanent Forgetfulness-15 [8], Sense Emotion-13 [1], Sense Foes-13 [1], Sense Spirit-13 [1], Sleep-15 [4], Summon Spirit-15 [4], Terror-15 [4], Turn Spirit-13 [1].

Equipment

Istvan wears a blood-red opal on a gold chain around his neck; the stone is a 10-point Powerstone. He usually carries a silver-headed walking-stick containing a hidden rapier, although he prefers his old cavalry saber in a real fight.

During the 20th century Istvan favors a "broomhandle" Mauser pistol; earlier than that he carries a black-powder Colt revolver or a single-shot cavalry pistol. After 1990 he wears a Kevlar vest if he knows he's going into battle. Before World War II, Roja rides a coal-black stallion; after that he gets around in cabs and rented cars (he can drive, but doesn't enjoy it).

Istvan Roja is built on the standard 150-point Vampire template, as described on page 262 of the Basic Set. He dislikes industrial-era and later technology -- he'll use advanced tech if he needs to, and certainly understands it, but given a choice he'll go low-tech. This also means that he particularly despises high-tech vampire hunters.

As a feudal lord in Transylvania, Roja was a fierce defender of his people. Since becoming a vampire he has retained that fierceness, but "his people" are now his fellow vampires. When dealing with other bloodsuckers, even those who are his rivals or personal enemies, Istvan is courteous and honorable. Any vampire in distress can appeal to him for help and be certain of getting it.

To mortals he is much less polite. To him they are domestic animals. Their lives are his to take or spare as he chooses, and he certainly doesn't have any use for their opinions. However, the flip side of this attitude is that when hunting vampire hunters, Istvan has no desire to torment them or gloat over their defeat. He is as coldly efficient as any pest exterminator.

Istvan has a well-crafted modern identity (the name of his modern alias is left to GMs to determine), as a wealthy chess aficionado with Swiss citizenship. His fortune is simply the accumulated assets of four centuries, transformed into capital and shrewdly invested. When he is not hunting vampire hunters, Istvan shuttles among the larger cities of Europe, with occasional vacations in Transylvania. He is very careful not to betray himself with his feeding -- he typically preys on single tourists or business travelers, then uses magic to erase any memories of the attack. If time is short and his hunger is great, he attacks outcasts like streetwalkers or beggars, confident that nobody will investigate their deaths too carefully.

Encountered

When planning a hunt, Istvan always uses Gastromancy plus hired private investigators and researchers in order to learn as much as possible about his targets. His methods vary depending on the quality and resources of his prey. Against ordinary humans who got lucky and killed a vampire, Istvan generally strikes fast and hard, trying to catch them outdoors and put them to the sword.

When dealing with professional-caliber hunters, Istvan may lay a cunning trap -- committing several sloppy, public attacks and leaving obvious clues which draw the hunters into a prepared ambush. A favorite trick is to prepare a "hidden vampire coffin" which contains a keg of gunpowder and nails triggered when the lid opens. Because he himself has both magical and mundane resources, he can target the weaknesses of a group. Against magicians he uses mundane weapons, hired goons, and cold steel. When dealing with combat-ready foes he calls upon spirits and uses spells (especially Fascinate, Sleep, and Terror).

The default setting for Istvan Roja is modern, but he can fit into almost any period from the age of revolutions to the cyberpunk future. In 19th-century settings, adjust the tech level of his Pistol skill down (he is typically one TL behind the state of the art) and possibly give him a band of loyal servants. During the Cliffhangers and World War II era,

Roja probably lies low to avoid getting caught in Europe's political upheavals, but he just might join forces with the Allies if there are Nazi vampire-hunters to fight. (Istvan knows who the Master Race are, and it isn't a bunch of Germans.)

In a *GURPS Cabal* campaign, Istvan is undoubtedly a top agent of the secret masters, the one who gets called in when other Ultors have failed. His rank in the Cabal is Theorist or better, so in a Cabal campaign add 4 levels of Rank in the organization, worth 20 points. He should also have the Secret True Name advantage at the 8-point level (he was confirmed as a Catholic, but that was centuries ago in a part of the world which has been ravaged by numerous wars and invasions since then). A Cabalist Istvan would grudgingly accept non-vampire members of the conspiracy as equals.

In a futuristic setting, his loathing for computers may be enough to qualify him for the Primitive disadvantage. On the plus side, he is probably Zeroed since he's been around since before computer databases. Gamemasters should decide if his vampiric non-reflectivity translates into Invisibility to machines. In the new century he will reluctantly upgrade from his Mauser to a reliable 20th-century European-made pistol like a Glock or Walther.

Campaign Uses

Istvan is a major villain, best used to throw at players who have beaten their share of supernatural perils and may be getting cocky. The realization that they are once again the hunted should scare even the most jaded characters.

If he isn't hunting the PCs, they may hear about the suspicious deaths of some NPC occult investigators and gradually learn the truth about how and why they were killed. But the deeper the heroes dig, the more likely they are to attract Roja's attention to themselves.

Roja can act as a Patron or a powerful Ally for a group of vampire PCs. He can help them if they're in need, but will also expect them to return the favor by assisting him in any current hunts. If they are "ethical" vampires friendly to humans -- such as the Iconic character Baron Janos Telkozep -- Roja will consider them traitors, although he will still treat them honorably. If a vampire manages to beat Roja once or twice, he is likely to become a personal Enemy.

However, in campaign settings where humans and vampires are trying to live together peacefully, Roja can be a respected fighter for mutual tolerance, battling bigoted stake-happy mortals. In that kind of setting, replace his Intolerance with Code of Honor (Gentleman's), and turn his Secret into the appropriate Social Stigma for being a vampire.

Roja's natural habitat is Horror campaigns, but he can be used elsewhere. His wealth and status make him a potential player in any vast secret conspiracy. Against capes-and-spandex superheroes he probably can't win in a stand-up fight, but could be quite effective working from the shadows to strike at dependent NPCs or vulnerable Secret Identity forms. In a fantasy campaign Roja can retain his castle and authority as the "Vampire Lord" of a minor fief which is a sanctuary for creatures of the night. Obviously his Pistol skill should be switched for Lance or possibly Axe/Mace, and his Language Talent and most of his languages should be cashed in for Shield skill.

Peter Rigby: Idea Thief

for *Over The Edge*

by Shane Cubis

"I saw it. This guy had an idea, and I saw it. It popped out on top of his head -- a light bulb! I grabbed the bulb and his face went blank".

When he is not sitting around at home or wandering the streets of his hometown, Peter Rigby works as a casual laborer. He gets up every morning and waits for a phone call that tells him he is needed to help clean a warehouse, shovel refuse, or perform some other mindless and menial task. If there is no work that day, the middle-aged slob will usually watch a bit of TV or head out into the crowds of the city to pilfer a few ideas from passersby.

Peter Rigby spontaneously developed the ability to steal ideas. He was on a crowded train one evening after work when he saw a cartoonish lightbulb go on over the head of one of his fellow passengers. He instinctively snatched the bulb and stuffed it into his pocket. In return he received a few odd looks, but no one else appeared to have seen the floating light. Since that fateful day Peter has stolen hundreds of ideas, but unfortunately cannot use them.

Peter has a form of ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder) that prevents him from concentrating on one subject for any length of time. This stops him from making anything of the ideas he has taken, and even from focusing on the bulbs long enough to understand the full ramifications of those strokes of genius he possesses. He hoards them jealously, unable to use them but damned if he will let anyone else gain their benefit.

Obviously, many power groups would love to get their hands on Rigby and his bulbs. Once he has plucked it from above the head of an unsuspecting victim, the bulb becomes visible and useable to anyone. An interested party could make use of the large backlog of ideas Peter has lying around his dingy apartment, and use him as an agent to steal the flashes of afflatus from rival groups.

Peter keeps all the bulbs in his laundry, which he rarely uses. From the outside, the room seems to be permanently aglow with powerful lighting, throwing bright beams underneath the closed door and around the edges of the permanently closed curtains. A person would have to wear sunglasses or shield his eyes in the room, as the power of a hundred differently watted light bulbs assault the senses upon entry. Most are clear, but a rare few throw off red, blue, or green light. Rigby has no idea how these ideas are different to the others. The careful explorer will also find that some of the bulbs no longer glow, having somehow burned out.

Once the party -- no doubt more curious and experimental than Peter Rigby has been -- gets their hands on a bulb or two, they will probably be looking for answers to the following questions:

- **What happens if you put one in a socket?** A bulb will provide a minor Intelligence bonus (in *Over The Edge,* an extra die to any action involving brain power) to anyone within its radiance for 1d6-2 hours. This uses up the idea inside forever.
- **What if you smash one?** When a bulb is smashed, the idea inside dissipates into the ether. It may linger on the edge of consciousness like a dream, but rapidly fades.
- **What happens if you put one in your mouth like Uncle Fester?** You get a cheap laugh from your comrades, and may singe your lips slightly. The bulbs are hot!
- **How do you get ideas out of the bulbs?** Peter has no idea and, quite frankly, neither do we. Looks like the characters will have to experiment.

Game Uses

The party may be chasing Peter for another reason, or simply stumble into his home. If something should happen to Peter, the group would have a large, weird cache of ever-glowing light bulbs. Even if they did not figure out the nature of the bulbs, they may be able to sell them as oddities. Anyone who knows the true power of them would attempt to buy the whole lot, taking advantage of the party's ignorance. Of course, if they did figure out the secret of the ideas hidden within the bulbs, the party should be able to command a far higher price, assuming they can protect the ideas and survive.

Perhaps Rigby stole an idea from a character or their patron, and they want it back. Otherwise, the PCs see a man snatch at the air above a person's head, and wonder he is doing. They may even see the flicker of a bulb themselves after Peter steals it, as it becomes visible to the world, and follow him back to his apartment.

Peter's prize idea, the one he will often stare at before becoming distracted or fidgety, is encased in a light bulb that requires two hands to hold. Multifaceted colors swirl within its depths, promising the secret knowledge of the world. He stole this bulb from an ordinary looking exterminator from downtown. The idea within the bulb represents a paradigm shift, along the lines of heliocentric cosmology, dada or the addition of a third actor in Ancient Greek theatre. If it can be somehow removed from the bulb, the idea would reshape the world. Obviously, many groups would be interested in exploiting this idea, and others would probably do their best to shatter the giant light bulb.

Peter's Stats for *Over the Edge*

Central Trait (Primary): *Idea Thief* -- 2 Dice. Peter can not only see people's ideas, he can steal them. (Surrounded by the uninspired, always has lit light bulbs in pockets).

Side Trait: *Avoids Notice* -- 3 Dice. Peter slips beneath the radar. He is unassuming, and most people pay no attention to him. He can easily evade pursuers, and witnesses to any of his actions are hard-pressed to pinpoint any details. (Looks like every other working class, middle-aged man, hard to pick out of a line up).

Side Trait: *Quick-Fingered Klepto* -- 3 Dice. Peter is surprisingly adept at sleight-of-hand. If he had the patience to practice, he could be an excellent magician or pickpocket. As it is, he has never been spotted stealing an idea -- as far as he is aware. (Long, twitching fingers, can flick cards into a hat.)

Flaw: *Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder.* Peter cannot focus on anything for longer than a few minutes. (Looks bored and fidgety all the time.)

Motivation: To steal as many ideas as possible, and hoard them away from the world.

Secret: Peter can't read, and would be terribly embarrassed and angry if someone found out. He can sign his name, but that is about it.

Languages: English

Important Person: The man he stole his first idea from. Peter has never spoken to him, but still sees him around town, looking depressed and deflated. He gave Rigby his first ever feeling of superiority.

Age: 38

HP: 21 (lots of hyperactive energy)

Pyramid Review

Around the World in 80 Days

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Written by Michael Rieneck

Illustrated by Bernd Wagenfeld

Full-color boxed set with mounted fold-out map board, 24 gold coin counters, 18 bonus chips, starting player piece, 15 event cards, 60 travel cards, six pawns, six time markers, six betting slips, & rules; $37.95

It may seem like an outdated property, but if you want to secure family fun, it's not a bad idea to dip into some older franchises that come from a more innocent time. *Around the World in 80 Days* may be a relic of the early 1870s, but it continues to be remade into movies, so why not a board game of the sort Rio Grande Games excels at?

The object of the game is to circumnavigate the globe in the fewest days.

Everyone starts their journey in London. They have a handful of travel cards, a pawn, and a gold coin for expenses (read: dice rerolls and buying additional cards). Their itinerary is on the map board, which shows a series of major cities like Paris, Calcutta, and San Francisco. Between each pair of locations on the trip are symbols showing what you need to cover that leg. Usually this is a combination of trains or ships.

The travel cards are all railway or water travel, and the numerical values are added together. For example, going from Suez to Bombay takes two ship cards, so if you have cards with a two and a seven, you make the trip in nine days. If the numbers match, the trip only takes as many days as one of them; play two "six" ships, and the trip is six days, not 12. Getting the quicker fare depends on which cards you can secure, but waiting too long for just the right selection allows everyone else to get ahead of you.

Your stash of money and cards won't carry you the whole journey, so along the way you'll pick up more resources. Each round, a new set of cards is laid face-up beside the board next to a set of symbols. The first player for this round (an honor that rotates or switches every turn) takes the card he wants and adds it to his hand. The symbol next to that card provides an additional effect or bonus, like gold coins, a balloon ride, or a chance to move the detective (who can add days to the tally of anyone unfortunate enough to be subjected to his questioning).

The balloon is one of a few alternate methods of travel sprinkled lightly throughout the game. Things like the submarine allow you to knock a few days off certain forms of transportation, or make specific legs easier to accomplish. These can be found in the event deck, among other goodies. Switch face-up cards before selecting them, travel to two cities in a single turn, or manipulate the detective. Storms and delays also lurk within, though, waiting to ruin everyone's travel plans.

The first person to arrive at a city gets a bonus marker, and these are good for more gold, event and travel cards, and time added to your opponents' time tracks. You also get a bonus marker if you're the last person to arrive, adding a little strategy (people in the middle get nothing). If a traveler makes it back to the Reform Club, the time markers for the remaining players suffer additional days of travel as a penalty. When a certain number of players circle the globe and end up back in London, everyone else has one more round to do the same; only those who make it to London may claim victory. Whoever makes it in the fewest days is the winner.

This game is a little cheaper, and this may be because it's lighter on the components. You're mercifully unburdened by piles of cards and counters (the plastic bin in the box has plenty of space for pieces even though they all fit in the ziplock baggie provided), though what you have is good quality. The cards are the most annoying bit; they're the tiny kind, only an inch or three on a side, so it's good you don't have to shuffle them more than you do (the bonus counters are on the small end as well).

Though they advertise it otherwise, the game does have rules for two players; these go a little faster and are less forgiving of those who lag behind. To be fair, even in a multiplayer game it's not hard to be left behind and never be able to catch back up. But **Around the World in 80 Days** does an impressive job of giving players the tools they need to get the job done, and clever play and planning are consistently rewarded. There are a lot of elements to balance, perhaps a few too many, but finding how to use the rules to your advantage is half the fun. It's a bright, clean game, easy and short, and good entertainment for the whole family.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Kobolds Ate My Baby! The Beer and Pretzels Roleplaying Game - Super Deluxx Edition

Designed by [9th Level Games](#)

Published by [Dork Storm Press](#)

Written by Chris O'Neill & Dan Landis

Cover & Illustrations by John Kovalic

48-page b&w hardcover; $14.99

In a year when the majority of the big roleplaying releases have been new editions of old games, along comes something much, much smaller, all about the nastiest of little things. After appearing in three previous editions, *Kobolds Ate My Baby!* returns not as the expected fourth edition, but as the surprising *Super Deluxx Edition.* To support all of that "Super Deluxx-ness," the new edition gets a load of new material, which, in the scheme of things, is not all that important. What *is* important is the upgrade from a saddlestitched booklet to a hardcover in the same format as the *Munchkin RPG,* and in particular, the fact that the *Super Deluxx Edition* is illustrated with the fine pen and inks of John Kovalic. Fans of previous editions should know that it is still designed by 9th Level Games, but is now published by Dork Storm Press, and that it is backwards compatible.

To be up front, *Kobolds Ate My Baby!* is a nasty, horrible little game. But it is fun, and that is what counts. Kobolds are just as nasty and horrible, and full of teeth, and have just the one thing on their teeny, weeny, tiny little walnut sized noodles. Food. And the fact that King Torg -- ALL HAIL KING TORG!™ -- is hungrier than any other Kobold. Plus he is bored with being served with Orcloaf Surprise for dinner. Which is more than one thing, but when King Torg -- ALL HAIL KING TORG!™ -- wants fresh baby flesh of young human on his platter that very night, another thought is necessary. So King Torg -- ALL HAIL KING TORG!™ -- sends the Kobolds out of the Cave baby hunting, and any Kobold returning with succulent baby meat is in line for a hoard of Victory Points. Or at least survives another night without finding himself skewered on a spit and slowly revolving as King Torg's -- ALL HAIL KING TORG!™ -- next snack. Kobold flesh you see, tastes like chicken. There is only one thing that tastes better than Kobold, and that is Chicken. And there is only one thing that tastes better than Chicken, and that is Baby.

Then again, there is the clever Kobold, a rare and much endangered species. The problem is, getting fresh baby back to the Cave in time to give King Torg -- ALL HAIL KING TORG!™ -- his tea, just might require some cleverness. Signs of such cleverness include not possessing "Everykobold" skills, possessing Dangerous skills like Sage or Trade, attempting to figure out Pi beyond two decimal places, rebelling against King Torg -- ALL HAIL KING TORG!™, casting a spell, mishandling fresh baby, and so forth. All of which irks the proverbial out of Vor, the Big Red God, who was so irked by Kobold antics that he became the God of Anger as well as the God of Kobolds. At such moments of irksiness, Vor is likely to strike, having a host of horrible deaths to bestow upon clever Kobolds, like being doused in baby oil (thus becoming attractive to *every* Kobold), a sudden hail of arrows, and an Eldritch tentacular attack. This can also occur when a Kobold fails a skill roll, which all makes for a short -- but hopefully interesting and entertaining -- life for the average Kobold.

Creating a Kobold is an easy task. Roll 2d6 each for four statistics -- Brawn, Ego, Extraneous, and Reflexes, with Extraneous covering both Luck and anything else not falling under the other three stats. Each attribute has an

associated secondary statistic, equal to a third of its value. These are Meat, Cunning, Luck, and Agility. He selects six skills, one of which should be the Everykobold skill (essentially Cook), the rest such that he has a minimum of one skill associated with the four statistics. Equipment is rolled for, consisting of one weapon, one bit of armor, and one bit of gear, all stolen or salvaged and available from the Cave Bazaar.

A Kobold also has three Edges (advantages) and three Bogies. Two of each are given, the remaining two are determined randomly. The innate Edges are Bark Like A Dog and Kobold Senses, the Bogies being Fearless and Taste Like Chicken. Random Edges include Troll Blood and Winning Smile, while random Bogies include In Heat and Taste Like Baby.

Every Kobold has The Horrible Death Record. This tracks the number of Cheques received whenever a Kobold is clever (as above) or at the Mayor's (as the GM is known) whim. Gain a Cheque, and a Kobold's total is the modifier for a Horrible Death roll on 2d6. Roll 14 and one occurs, selected randomly from the Kobold Horrible Death Chart.

If a Kobold has the Lackey skill, then he has worked for a mage, perhaps even the Evil Arch Warlock Tabriz. This was an opportunity to learn something, in particular, a magic spell. Kobold magic is, of course, dangerous and clever. And in keeping with the silliness of it all, the spells parody those of a certain famous game, like *Bail's Floating Frying Pan* (useful for cooking *and* hitting), *Wall of Beer,* and *Pimpy's Slapping Hand.*

Mechanically, ***Kobolds Ate My Baby!*** employs the same ***BEER Engine System*** found in 9th Level Games' ***[Ninja Burger: The Roleplaying Game.](#)*** To do anything, a Kobold rolls a number of six-sided dice aiming to get under the appropriate statistic. Easy tasks require fewer dice, harder or multiple tasks need more. For an opposed roll the number of dice is determined by the target's secondary stat. For example, when hitting another Kobold, his Agility is the number of dice rolled. Combat, or just smacking things, is simple. Weapons or teeth and claws do damage, armor is smashed and falls off, and once a Kobold has lost his Hits (equal to his Brawn), he takes a Dirt Nap. Kobolds do not understand the concept of dodging.

A successful Kobold, though rare, can earn Victory Points. These can buy him a visit to the Bazaar for new and better gear, or an Outfit. Although expensive -- 12 versus the 2 for the shopping trip -- an Outfit bestows both benefits and a little class on the Kobold. They include Kobold Veteran, Short Order Cook, Cutpurse, Rules Lawyer, Evil Apprentice, and Bootlicker. It is possible to obtain more than one Outfit, but this is invariably beyond a Kobold's lifespan.

Kobolds Ate My Baby! is played in a particular way. The players sit in decreasing Extraneous order to the left of the Mayor, with Kobold actions taken not in the free-for-all of a normal RPG, but in that order with the Mayor going last. The game almost has a boardgame-like feel, but less so than in previous editions or ***Ninja Burger: The Roleplaying Game.*** There is also the element of acting out, as some in-game effects cannot happen without a player's actual input. For example, the Winning Smile Edge only works when the player is actually smiling, and Bark Like A Dog needs the player to, yes, bark. This goes up a notch in the House Rules! Mention King Torg and everyone must yell, "ALL HAIL KING TORG!™" When a Kobold dies, then his player can deliver a hopefully moving soliloquy to keep all of his Victory Points for the new character. As such, these are not really House Rules! Rather they could not find a home elsewhere in the book, and their use should be near mandatory as they add much flavor and fun.

For the Mayor, there is a quick and dirty guide to running ***Kobolds Ate My Baby!*** In plain terms, keep it simple, keep it silly, and have fun. In addition to The Kobold Horrible Death Charts and The Baby Horrible Death Charts (for when an unfortunate Kobold has an accident), there are rules for creating a town to home to fresh baby flesh, and a sample adventure, "What's For Lunch?"

Physically, ***Kobolds Ate My Baby!*** is nicely put together, greatly benefiting from John Kovalic's stalwart illustrations. Even though Matt and Igor of *Dork Tower* fame make an appearance, it is a pity that the interior is black and white. It would have looked so good in color. That aside, the game itself is amusingly written, and of course, it includes opportunities aplenty for the Mayor to be rotten to his Kobold players. Just as they will be rotten to each other in the scramble to gain Victory Points. In this, it shares some similarity with ***[Paranoia,](#)*** the GM being allowed to have as much fun as his players.

Of course, games like this should played infrequently, or the humor value is quickly lost. After all, a Kobold can

progress only so far. Easy to set-up, easy to run, ***Kobolds Ate My Baby! The Beer and Pretzels Roleplaying Game -- Super Deluxx Edition*** is raucous, rambunctious, and best suited to an evening's silliness.

--Matthew Pook

Official Rules, and Other of Oxymorons

Back when I was an undergraduate in college -- a great five-year period of my life -- I used to spend hours in the lobby of the honors dormitory, playing cards with others. Sure, I vaguely remember the background chatter of something called "classes" or some-such, but playing cards was a lot more interesting. Anyway, although we played perennials such as Spades and Hearts, our game of choice was one introduced to us a Minnesotan (who's also a *Pyramid* subscriber and was part of my long-suffering Supers group) called "500." He taught us the rules and the lingo, and all my knowledge of the game stemmed from the collective experience.

Anyway, sometime around my second or third year of college, I was in a Barnes & Noble and decided to crack open a copy of *Hoyle's Rules of Games* to see what it said about my beloved game. In perusing the rules, I discovered two things: first, that the *Hoyle's* book had all the warmth, charm, and approachability of a turn-of-the-20th-century calculus textbook; and second, that the rules we'd been playing under didn't seem to bear much resemblance to the actual rules there.

Now, thanks to the wonders of Wikipedia, I reacquainted myself with an authoritative accounting of the rules of 500, and discovered that 1) Wikipedia is written by human beings, and 2) the rules are actually a fair bit closer than I'd remembered seeing in that old book. However, I curiously noted that there were still major game-affecting discrepancies between our rules and the rules written there. (For those curious, some of the differences include: Only one round of bidding; able to bid any number of tricks, including less than six; no Misère or Open Misère bids; and being able to win by taking enough non-bid tricks to reach 500.)

That grinding noise you hear is the sound of shifting gears. Anyway, I was running a classic *Torg* adventure at a convention a year or so ago, and one of the players happened to be the current owner of the *Torg* license as well as my boss. The short of it is, this guy knew his *Torg,* whereas I had barely managed to skim the core rulebook an hour before. (I note that "skimming the rulebook" is more prep than I've done for many a game.) Anyway, one of the things I introduced to make the game go faster was the idea of a "passive" or "reflexive" observation roll; many games assume that the PCs aren't walking around with laundry sacks over their heads, utterly devoid of all stimulus unless they specifically state, "I'm looking for clues." So I'd routinely call for random "Find" rolls (or whatever skill it is with *Torg* . . . darned if I remember), and, if successful, make a comment like, "You hear an odd digging noise coming from below."

Anyway, after the game was over, the *Torg* grand poobah informed me that the game didn't really have a mechanism such as I was using, and he told me the correct way that the rules allow for such information (which, if I recall, involves using the default numbers of people's abilities *without* a roll). Nevertheless, he said that the rule I was using worked fine, and it helped keep the game going at a brisk pace.

Now, here's the interesting thing . . . and this paragraph can be copy/pasted to the end of both anecdotes: Even though we weren't playing by "official" rules, we still had a great time. More importantly, I don't think it matters in the slightest that we weren't playing "correctly"; if the old gang got together and wanted to play a game of *500/Torg,* I'd probably play by the rules I'd been using all along, even if I knew they weren't "right."

This year is a relatively low-key April Fool's issue; I'm still running some lighter fare than "typical" issues, but it's not a tightly knit theme as in times past. But even so, I always appreciate the holiday for the way the usual rules don't apply. And, applied to gaming, I think that it's not necessary for all the rules to apply, just so long as everyone has fun. (Of course, some gamers are only happy if all the rules *are* being applied; so long as all the players agree and are having fun, there's nothing wrong with that, either.) Perhaps, even more so, I think that some players like figuring out how the rules are different, or playing with variant rules. For example, one of the reasons I enjoy running a game like *Torg* is that the heroes can end up anywhere, and the rules don't necessarily apply. This is also a common technique in many Supers games, where it's common to end up in an alternate dimension where (say) everyone can fly or everyone is one-tenth as powerful. (And I could also mention the *Dungeons & Dragons* rules for alternate planes, where nothing works quite as it was expected.)

Anyway, I love being kept on my toes as a player, and I like keeping players on their toes. And as long as the rules are (more or less) fair to everyone, and folks have fun, who cares? Accept the spirit of April Fool's, and don't worry about playing "by the book" . . . even if your games wouldn't be sanctioned by the Intergalactic Correct Game-Playing Guild.

--Steven Marsh

Dork Tower!

Previous installments of the Brief History of Gaming series:

The Many Faces of Evil

for the *d20 System*

by Michael Tresca

Paladins have a multitude of divine powers, from turning the living dead to healing the wounded, from calling upon the divine grace of the gods to summoning a holy mount. And yet the least of the paladin's abilities, the ability to detect evil, is often overlooked.

With the power to know a person's soul comes great responsibility. What does a paladin do when he detects evil in someone who has yet to exhibit any evil actions? Does he draw a sword and kill the man, thereby committing murderer in the eyes of the law? For that matter, what's considered evil, exactly? This article explores the consequences peering into another person's soul.

Detect evil, at a glance, is a visual response. Like a smudge of dirt, it appears on people and things that bear its taint. But what is evil? Your paladin might specialize in a particular form of evil detection, depending on his deity's background.

Types of Evil

Guilt: The target doesn't have to actually commit an evil act; he just has to feel guilty about it. Guilty targets are victims of their own conscience. This form of detection might make a psychotic murderer completely immune to the paladin's power, as the madman doesn't feel guilt over his crime. Guilt over failing to finish a chore gives off a dim aura; guilt over murdering one's wife is an overwhelming aura.

Example: A paladin detects evil on the mayor, a good-aligned pillar of the community. The mayor detects as evil because he cheated on his wife and feels guilt over it.

Sin: The target actually must commit a sin to be detected as evil. The sins are outlined by the paladin's (not the target's) religion. There are two types of sins: venial (minor) and mortal (major) sins. The GM provides the framework, but whatever the case, the paladin views each target through his deity's uncompromising gaze. Venial sins give off a faint aura; mortal sins give off a strong aura.

Example: A paladin of a particularly frugal deity detects evil on a wealthy merchant. The rich merchant detects as evil. Even though the merchant doesn't consider hording cash to be a sin, the paladin's deity does.

Violence: The only sin that shows up is when violence is the root cause. The violence does not necessarily have to end in murder, but only the psychic shock leaves behind traces the paladin can detect. Spanking a child gives off a dim aura; murdering a child gives off an overwhelming aura.

Example: The paladin detects evil on an elderly woman, because she recently beat her young son for not fetching a pail quickly enough.

Reputation: The majority judges the target. This majority can be the other people in the room, the town where the target lives, or the target's family and friends. Regardless, if they think the target is evil, it detects as evil. An individual that is disliked gives off a dim aura; a heinous villain that everyone despises gives off an overwhelming aura.

Example: The paladin detects evil on a leper. The leper is loathed because he is believed to spread the plague. Whether or not this is true, he detects as evil.

Taint: Evil is as evil does. This form of detect evil only detects supernatural evil or evil so heinous it must be diabolically influenced. More often, a demonic or devilish taint is left behind after the fiend has moved on. The evil power is dependent on the creature's hit dice or caster level, as indicated in the spell's description.

Example: The paladin detects evil on an inn. A demon passed through disguised as a courtier. The paladin sees evil on every footstep, the mug it drank from, and the barmaid it danced with.

Falsehood: Evil is anyone who knowingly conceals the truth about anything. Bald-faced lies and little white lies are all detected by this power. The lie must have been committed within (paladin's level in rounds). Little white lies give off dim auras; bald-faced lies gives off moderate auras.

Example: The paladin detects evil on a barmaid, because she lied about her last tip.

Skills

Once the nature of the paladin's detection ability is determined, it can be used to bolster the paladin's skills. The bonuses the paladin can receive by using his detect evil power in conjunction with a skill cannot exceed a certain amount, depending on the strength of the evil in question. An aura strength of dim can only provide a +1 bonus, faint +2, moderate +3, strong +4, and overwhelming +5. All bonuses are considered sacred bonuses.

Below are some suggestions for how skills should be modified in conjunction with detect evil.

Appraise (taint, reputation, violence): The paladin can use his detect evil ability to confirm the nature of the item being appraised. The paladin using detect evil can make an Appraise check (DC 20) to determine if the item has an evil reputation or was used in an evil act.

Craft, Alchemy (taint): A paladin using detect evil can make a Craft check (DC 20) just as if he were detecting poison. This will identify if any evil components were used in the substance's creation, such as demon ichor or a mass murderer's powdered bones.

Decipher Script (taint, reputation): By making a Decipher Script check (DC 30), the paladin can use his detect evil ability to get the gist of any script written in Abyssal, Giant, Gnoll, Goblin, Infernal, Orc, or Undercommon. He is not able to read it word for word but comprehends the general intent of the script.

Diplomacy (guilt, sin): By knowing the nature of a person's soul, the paladin can boost diplomatic relations in his favor. He knows who to trust and who to avoid. He receives a +1 sacred bonus on Diplomacy checks for every 4 levels in paladin.

Forgery (taint, falsehood): The paladin can use his detect evil ability to detect forgeries. He receives his Wisdom bonus to his opposed Forgery check.

Gather Information (reputation): By knowing the reputation of a particular person, the paladin can use his detect evil to zero in on information about him or her. The paladin finds out more on a successful Gather Information check (DC 25).

Heal (taint): The paladin can detect evil in a person's body. The taint is considered to be inherently evil, but it must be more than just a common wound -- poisons, diseases, and festering wounds. The paladin receives his paladin level/4 as a sacred bonus to treat poison or disease while using the detect evil power.

Intimidate (all): The paladin can reveal things about his target, terrifying him as the victim's most intimate nature is revealed. This isn't necessarily a good act in itself, but the paladin can use it as leverage. The paladin receives his Wisdom bonus to the Intimidate check while using his detect evil power.

Knowledge (reputation): The paladin is divinely guided about all things religious or extraplanar. While attempting to

research how to defeat an evil thing, he receives his paladin level/4 as a sacred bonus while using his detect evil power.

Search (taint): The paladin can discover traps with evil magical spells or set by particularly evil beings as a rogue can.

Sense Motive (guilt, sin, falsehood): The paladin can detect evil motives in his target. He receives his paladin level/4 as a sacred bonus while using his detect evil power.

Spellcraft (taint, violence): The paladin can detect and identify spells of an evil nature. The paladin receives his Wisdom bonus to the roll against DC 20 + the spell's level while using his detect evil power.

Spot (sin, falsehood, violence, reputation): The paladin's chances of detecting an evil being are increased while using this skill. He receives his paladin level/4 as a sacred bonus while using the detect evil power against evil targets. If the paladin's specialty is in detecting falsehood, this sacred bonus applies to detecting disguises.

Survival (taint): The paladin can track tainted beings on a successful check (DC 25) regardless of terrain type while using his detect evil power. The paladin can sense the direction of an evil person or thing. The paladin receives his paladin level/4 as a sacred bonus to the check while using his detect evil power.

Detect Evil Advantages and Disadvantages

For players who want their detect evil abilities to be truly unique to their paladin, below are a list of advantages and disadvantages. As a general guideline, a paladin can have one major advantage or two minor advantages at the cost of one disadvantage. The manifestation of these side effects should be derived from the deity or ethos the paladin worships.

As another option, paladins can gain a minor advantage for one feat and a major advantage at the cost of two feats. To determine an advantage or disadvantage randomly, roll 1d6.

Disadvantages

1. **Ability Loss:** The effort to detect evil strains the paladin. By peering into the heart of evil, he is exhausted in some way, either physically or mentally. The paladin must make a Fort save (DC level of target) or suffer a temporary ability drain to Constitution or Wisdom of 1 point per 2 levels of the target.
2. **Insanity:** The paladin's mind is subjected to the incredible strain of evil. The paladin must make a Will save (DC level of target) or go temporarily insane for 1d20 rounds. The paladin suffers the effects of the confusion spell during this time. Alternately, he can suffer from an insanity specific to the nature of evil he was detecting.
3. **Empathy:** The paladin actually feels the effects of the sins committed by the target. If there is a victim that most recently suffered from that evil, such as a wound, the paladin suffers that same damage as nonlethal damage. If the victim died, the paladin takes the same amount of hit point damage suffered -- it's possible the paladin can be knocked unconscious by detecting an act of murder in this fashion.
4. **Impious Evil:** If the paladin fails a Will save (DC target's level) he inadvertently manifests a form of evil as a quasit, imp, or neutral evil fire mephit, as appropriate to the target's form of evil. The evil that is part of the target is erased completely -- guilt is relieved, crimes are forgotten, lies become truths in the victim's mind. For that particular form of evil, it cannot be detected again as the victim is absolved of the past. The outsider will do its best to tempt the target to more evil, however, and may not immediately reveal itself.
5. **Deep Trance:** While using his power the paladin can do nothing -- he is unaware of his own surroundings on the activities around him while in the trance, frozen in the same position. He is defenseless, both physically and mentally.
6. **Righteous Rage:** The paladin must make a Will save (DC target's level) when detecting evil or be overcome with righteous rage. He gains a +2 morale sacred bonus to Strength and Constitution, a +1 morale sacred bonus on Will saves, a 1 sacred penalty to AC and immediately attacks the evil target, striking to kill until the paladin

or the target is dead.

Minor Advantages

1. **Pangs of Guilt:** The target envisions the most recent act of evil he committed, clearly and vividly. Even if the subject would not normally feel guilty, he must make a Will save (DC level of paladin) or suffer a 1 morale sacred penalty per 4 levels of the paladin to future Will saves for the rest of the day.
2. **Flashbacks:** The paladin witnesses the evil as if its were playing out before his very eyes. He can identify faces, voices, and locations, giving a +1 sacred bonus per 4 levels of paladin to Listen, Spot, and Search checks when encountering the same people or situation.
3. **Good Beacon:** When the paladin detects evil, good outsiders are immediately attracted to the paladin's location, as per the sympathy spell as if cast by the paladin for the duration of the detection.
4. **Comfort:** While the paladin is detecting evil, the target feels at peace. The target must make a Will save (DC paladin's level) or be calmed as per the calm emotions spell.
5. **Circle of Detection:** The paladin can choose to detect evil as a full circle (rather than a quarter circle) at half the range (30 feet). The paladin can switch between the two area types of detection each round.
6. **Sounds of Devilry:** While detecting evil, the paladin can detect falsehoods related to his particular brand of detection as per the discern lies spell. The lies manifest themselves as roaring, demonic voices that require the paladin to make a Listen check (DC target's level) to comprehend. Otherwise, he only knows that the target lied.

Major Advantages

1. **Reform:** The paladin's ability to detect evil becomes so powerful that a victim who regrets his sins can seek to atone for his ways. By making a successful Will save (DC the victim's own level) he can benefit from the effects of an atonement spell (redemption) as if cast by the paladin.
2. **Transposed Agony:** The target envisions the most recent act of evil he committed, clearly and vividly. He is wracked with pain as he feels the suffering the victim of his evil suffered. The target must make a Will save (DC paladin's level) or he collapses to the ground as if knocked down. Thereafter, he suffers a 2 morale sacred penalty per give levels of paladin to all saves for the rest of the day.
3. **Malignant Guise:** The paladin's detect evil ability shows everyone for a moment what the target's true nature is in graphic, visual detail. A bloodthirsty murderer appears dripping in blood; a sadistic torturer stands cackling with an instrument of torture in his hands, an unfaithful lover appears seductively dressed, etc. Everyone who witnesses the event is aware of the evil and, at the DM's option, the victim suffers a 1 sacred penalty per four levels of paladin to all Charisma based rolls with the witnesses.
4. **Mind Read:** The target must make a Will save (DC paladin's level) or the paladin temporarily inhabits the target's mind. The paladin cannot exert control over the target but is privy to his thoughts as a detect thoughts spell.
5. **Second Sight:** The target must make a Will save (DC paladin's level) or the paladin temporarily taps into the target's senses. The paladin cannot exert control over the target but is privy to everything he sees and hears as a clairaudience/clairvoyance spell.
6. **Mark of Judgment:** If the paladin detects evil on a target, it must make a Will save (DC paladin's level) or be marked with a mark of justice in the shape of the paladin's sacred symbol. This mark usually appears over the target's left breast (over its heart, if it has one).

New Spells

Detect Falsehood

Divination
Level: Clr 5, Pal 4
Components: V, S, DF
Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)
Target: One creature
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 round/level
Saving Throw: Will negates
Spell Resistance: Yes

When casting this spell, the caster perceives one sentient creature's level of falsehood as a yellow aura. The deeper the shade of yellow, the more egregious the target's lies.

Evil is anyone who knowingly conceals the truth about anything. Bald-faced lies and little white lies are all detected by this power. The lie must have been committed within one minute of the spell's casting per level of the caster. Unintentional lies are lies that are said without the target's knowledge that he was speaking an untruth. White lies are "harmless" lies that are false, but cause little impact. A lie of omission deliberately leaves out relevant information. A lie of commission is a deliberate falsehood. A bald faced lie is a blatant, egregious lie, usually to cover up an even more sinister deed.

Severity of Lie	Aura Strength
Unintentional lie	Pale Yellow
White lie	Light Yellow
Lie of Omission	Yellow
Lie of Commission	Dark Yellow
Bald faced lie	Dun

So long as he continues to concentrate on the subject, any lie spoken by the target is immediately detected as his aura changes to match the level of deceit.

Detect Reputation

Divination
Level: Clr 1, Pal 1
Components: V, S, DF
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)
Target: One creature
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 round/level
Saving Throw: Will negates
Spell Resistance: Yes

When casting this spell, the caster perceives one sentient creature's level of reputation as a green aura. The deeper the shade of green, the lower the target's reputation with the majority of the target's peers. The target's peers can be the other people in the room, the town where the target lives, or the target's family and friends. The general target's reputation is based on the Attitude of the community towards the target. A hunted murderer glows dark green while an admired king glows pale green.

Reputation Level	Aura Strength
Friendly	Pale Green
Indifferent	Light Green
Unfriendly	Green
Hostile	Dark Green

If an NPC casts this spell on a PC, the NPC may change his attitude as a result.

Detect Taint

Divination
Level: Clr 1, Pal 1, Rgr 1
Components: V, S, DF
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 60 ft.
Area: Quarter circle emanating from the character to the extreme of the range
Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes/level (D)
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No

This spell works in a similar fashion to the *detect evil* spell but is another variant that removes the easy means of determining the alignment of "normal" sentient beings. It only detects supernatural evil or evil so heinous it must be diabolically influenced. More often, a demonic or devilish taint is left behind after the fiend has moved on. The caster sees all that the fiend has touched as a black aura.

Creature/Object	Evil Power
Undead creature	HD/2
Evil elemental	HD/2
Evil magic item or spell	Caster level/2
Evil outsider	HD
Cleric of an evil deity	Level
Item touched by evil	Owner's evil power - # of rounds last touched

Evil Power	Aura Strength
Lingering	Dim
1 or less	Faint
24	Moderate
510	Strong
11+	Overwhelming

Original Strength	Duration of Aura
Faint	1d6 minutes
Moderate	1d6×10 minutes
Strong	1d6 hours
Overwhelming	1d6 days

If the caster has the ability to track footprints, he receives a +10 bonus to track supernatural evil creatures with this spell for the duration. The caster also receives a +4 sacred bonus to Spot and Search checks involving the supernatural evil.

If an aura falls into more than one strength category, the spell indicates the stronger of the two. Each round, the character can turn to detect things in a new area. The spell can penetrate barriers, but one foot of stone, one inch of common metal, a thin sheet of lead, or three feet of wood or dirt blocks it.

Detect Evil Feats

In campaigns where detect evil is much more common, paladins, clerics, and rangers might have access to much more refined abilities to sniff out evil and corruption. At the GM's discretion, these feats allow a greater range of results in detecting evil.

Circle of Detection [Metamagic]

Prerequisite: Ability to cast *detect evil* spell or variant.

Benefit: The caster can choose to detect evil with an area of a 30-ft. full circle, centered on the caster. The caster can switch between the two area types of detection each round. The detection spell uses up a spell slot one level higher than the spell's actual level.

Comfort [Metamagic]

While the caster is detecting evil, the target feels at peace.

Prerequisite: Ability to cast *detect evil* spell or variant.

Benefit: The target must make a Will save (DC caster's level) or be calmed as per the *calm emotions* spell. The detection spell uses up a spell slot one level higher than the spell's actual level.

Flashbacks [Metamagic]

The caster witnesses the evil as if its were playing out before his very eyes.

Prerequisite: Ability to cast *detect evil* spell or variant.

Benefit: He can identify faces, voices, and locations, giving a +1 sacred bonus per 4 levels of caster to Listen, Spot, and Search checks when encountering the same people or situation. The detection spell uses up a spell slot one level higher than the spell's actual level.

Good Beacon [Metamagic]

Prerequisite: Ability to cast *detect evil* spell or variant; Charisma 13+.

Benefit: When the caster detects evil, good outsiders are immediately attracted to the caster's location, as per the *sympathy* spell as if cast by the caster for the duration of the detection. The detection spell uses up a spell slot one level higher than the spell's actual level.

Malignant Guise [Metamagic]

The caster's *detect evil* spell shows everyone for a moment what the target's true nature is in graphic, visual detail.

Prerequisite: Ability to cast *detect evil* spell or variant; Charisma 13+.

Benefit: A bloodthirsty murderer appears dripping in blood; a sadistic torturer stands cackling with an instrument of torture in his hands, an unfaithful lover appears seductively dressed, etc. Everyone who witnesses the event is aware of the evil and, at the DM's option, the victim suffers a 1 sacred penalty per four levels of caster to all Charisma based rolls with the witnesses. The detection spell uses up a spell slot two levels higher than the spell's actual level.

Mind Read [Metamagic]

The caster violates the mind of the person who committed the evil, opening his thoughts to the caster.

Prerequisite: Ability to cast *detect evil* spell or variant; Intelligence 13+.

Benefit: The target must make a Will save (DC caster's level) or the caster temporarily inhabits the target's mind. The caster cannot exert control over the target but is privy to his thoughts as a *detect thoughts* spell. The detection spell uses up a spell slot two levels higher than the spell's actual level.

Reform [Metamagic]

The caster's *detect evil* spell becomes so powerful that a victim who regrets his sins can seek to atone for his ways.

Prerequisite: Ability to cast *detect evil* spell or variant.

Benefit: By making a successful Will save (DC the victim's own level) he can benefit from the effects of an atonement spell (redemption) as if cast by the caster. The detection spell uses up a spell slot two levels higher than the spell's actual level.

Second Sight [Metamagic]

The caster can see and hear everything the target committed through the detection spell, from the point of view of the target.

Prerequisite: Ability to cast *detect evil* spell or variant; Wisdom 13+.

Benefit: The target must make a Will save (DC caster's level) or the caster temporarily taps into the target's senses. The caster cannot exert control over the target but is privy to everything he sees and hears as a *clairaudience/clairvoyance* spell. The detection spell uses up a spell slot two levels higher than the spell's actual level.

The paladin's detect evil ability can be a blessing or a curse, a powerful tool to investigate a murder or a terrifying means of revealing the evil that lurks in the hearts of men. Use it wisely.

Ritual Magic for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Bevan Thomas

Magic gives detailed information on a magic system appropriate for high fantasy campaigns where wizards throw fireballs and shatter castle walls, performing miracles by saying a couple of words of power and making a few cryptic gestures. It mentions "ritual magic," though only in describing how "ritual wizards" learn their spells in a different manner than normal wizards, not going into any detail about how performing these rituals is different from high fantasy wizardry.

This article explores the principles and techniques of the ritual spell-caster (who is called an "adept" in order to differentiate him from the wizard of the core magic rules). It was inspired by the ritual magic rules from *Spirits,* but treats ritual magic as a modification to the system in the *Basic Set* and *Magic* instead of as a completely new set of rules.

The Principles of Ritual Magic

This section discusses all the changes between Ritual Magic and the "wizardry" of the normal *GURPS* magic system. Any magic rule not discussed here functions as described in *Magic* (such as how distraction affects spell-casting).

Mana and Ritual Magic

The default assumption in this article is that ritual magic derives from mana just as wizardry does. It is affected by mana levels, as well as advantages such as Magic Resistance, Mana Damper, and Mana Enhancer. As with wizardry, no one who possesses Magic Resistance or Mana Damper may perform ritual magic.

It is up to the GM to decide if wizardry and ritual magic exist together in his campaign. If they do, then they are learned completely independently of each other, so, for example, normal Magery does not add to path scores, and levels in ritual spells cannot be used as prerequisites for wizardry spells. However, both are considered magic for the purpose of spells and other effects, so a Pentagram inscribed by an adept would guard against a demon summoned by a wizard, and a wizard could use Remove Curse to restore someone turned to ice by an adept.

Learning Ritual Magic

Ritual magic is dependent upon a single "core skill." This skill must be Very Hard, and is usually Ritual Magic (p. B128) or Thaumatology (p. B225). However, depending upon how the GM wishes to use ritual magic in his campaign, other VH skills are possible. Alchemy or Herb Lore are obvious alternatives, as they already produce supernatural effects, as is Musical Influence for bardic magic (in the case, the spells' rituals will probably be musically orientated). Computer Hacking or Weird Science might be appropriate for technomancers and cybershamans, whereas "chi skills" such as Body Control or Invisibility Art would be logical choices for magic that derives from martial arts. Even science skills such as Physics and Biology could be employed in a campaign where magic is actually fringe science.

Each college of magic is an IQ/Very Hard "college skill" or "path" that defaults to the core skill at 6. Each college skill may not be higher than the core skill. Each spell is a Hard technique that defaults to the relevant college skill. The default's penalty is equal to the spell's prerequisite count (p. M6), and in order to raise a spell above this level, the adept must have at least one point in the path. However, he is able to ignore all of the spell's normal prerequisites. Spells cannot be higher than the associated path.

Unlike wizardry, ritual magic derives from knowledge and not from inborn power. Because of this, Ritual Magery is not needed to perform rituals; it simply makes the spellcasting easier. Ritual Magery adds to the core skill, paths, and spells. It is entirely separate from normal Magery. As Ritual Magery is talent, not magical power, Aspected Ritual

Magery cannot generally be taken. Another important difference is that it cannot be used to detect magical items (there is no "Ritual Magery 0"), and so Ritual Magery 1 only costs 10 points (Ritual Magery 2 costs 20, RM 3 costs 30, and so forth).

Time Required and Energy Cost

Ritual magic spells do not usually drain FP or HP (except in the way that FP is normally lost through sustained activity and lack of sleep). Instead, they take a far greater time to cast than normal spells. Most ritual spells take 10 minutes to cast per point of its normal casting cost. For example, Seek Pass costs 3 points, and so if cast with ritual magic, takes 30 minutes, whereas Plane Shift costs 20 points, and so it takes three hours and 20 minutes (200 minutes).

As with wizardry, if your base skill with a spell is 15 or more, reduce the cost by 1 point; if you have skill 20 or more, reduce it by 2; and continue to decrease the cost by 1 for every five levels above skill 20. For example, if you have Plane Shift at skill 25, it would only take 150 minutes to cast. All ritual spells take at least ten minutes to cast. This replaces the rules for reducing casting time for spells found on page 8 of *Magic.*

Maintaining Spells

If a spell can be maintained in the normal rules, it can also be maintained through ritual magic. As long as the adept continues to chant, wave his wands, and perform the rest of his magic ritual, the spell will be maintained. If his concentration is broken or the spell otherwise ends prematurely, he must start the whole process all over again. This means that while maintaining a spell, an adept can do nothing else.

Alternately, an adept can take longer to cast the initial spell in order to extend its duration without needed to maintain it afterward. Simply add the cost to maintain to the normal point total and determine how long it takes from there. For example, Earthquake requires 2 energy to cast, and the same to maintain, and has a duration of one minute. Therefore, it takes 20 minutes to cast the spell if it is to last one minute, 40 minutes if it going to last two minutes, one hour if it is going to last three minutes, and so forth. As this increased casting time takes place before the spell is cast, it cannot be combined with the previous method of maintaining spells. The adept must choose to make use of one or the other.

Enchantments

Adepts can use "slow and sure" enchanting (p. 18 of *Magic*), with only a few minor differences from the wizard version. Anyone who possesses the necessary spell at level 15+ (if the default level of the relevant path is high enough, it qualifies) counts as a mage for the purpose of putting in "mage-days," and only a loss of the primary mage ends the project. They do not normally have a "quick and dirty" version (page 17), though ritual charms somewhat compensate for it.

Even magical items created by adepts drain energy when used, and powerstones may be dedicated to them as normal. In fact, the only time that adepts may make use of a powerstone's energy is if it is dedicated or exclusive to a magical item. This means that manastones are of no use to them.

Charms

A ritual charm (as opposed to an alchemical one) is an object charged with a spell in a manner similar to a scroll. In order to bind a spell into a charm, the spell takes a third again as long to cast. So if the spell normally takes three hours to cast, than it takes four hours if the end result is a charm. The adept can extend the charm's duration by taking longer to cast it as with normal ritual magic (this time is calculated before the spell is multiplied by one and a third).

When the charm is made, the caster must determine the result of the spell (for example, using Lightning against Lord Marcus or walking through the wall of Redraven Keep). He then may carry the charm with him, and when in the right position, he may active it. The charm will only work if it is being used exactly in the way that the spell was described while being cast. So the aforementioned Lightning charm would only spew out its energy if pointed at Lord Marcus

and no other. Other people may be affected by the spell, but they cannot be the main target (so a fireball would burn everyone caught in its radius, but it would only activate if centered around the prescribed person or place). Activating the charm takes the spell's normal time to cast (one to three seconds in the case of Lightning) and has the normal range, but it costs no energy.

Once a charm is activated, it crumbles to dust. All charms are delicate things, often bags filled with relevant objects or small objects tied together with string or rope. If they are damaged or altered in any way (such as the objects being removed from the bag or untied from the string), then they become useless, the magic within them dispelling harmlessly.

The Ritual

It is up to the Game Masters and the players to determine exactly what form the magic rituals take. It could be intense dancing, long chants accompanied by complicated gestures made with a wand, or even silent meditation. In some settings, each adept will have his own unique method, and in others it will be determined by his magic tradition or there might even be only one style that everyone follows.

Depending upon the magic style, the words of the spell could either be the adept's own language or an archaic or "sacred" one such as Ancient Egyptian, Hebrew, Latin, or Sanskrit. It may even be spoken in a non-human language such the speech of angels or dragons or a special language that is used only for casting spells. A spell cast in a language that you have at Accented is at 4, and cannot be cast at all with only a Broken understanding. A spell would be written down in the same language that it is spoken, and so would require the adept to be fully literate in the language in question.

Unlike wizardry, ritual magic often makes extensive use of material components, with symbols drawn on the ground, objects burned in a large fire or tossed into the wind, offerings made to various spirits, etc. A list of common components and the spell collages they relate to is located on page 222 of *Magic.* A more complete listing of various components and arcane modifiers is found within *Cabal.*

The Adept's Grimoire

As befits a more subtle breed of spell-caster, the adept is often thought to focus on different spells than the wizard, favoring the summoning of spirits and divining the future over elemental mastery and flashy magic duels. Here are presented various ideas on the spells that an adept would have access to.

Blatant Will-Working

Ritual charms are included in this article to allow spell-casters to perform rituals akin to those of classic folklore, but still be able to throw fire and lightning and perform other extreme acts of power that are so common in modern fantasy. GMs who prefer magic to be more low-key can easily remove ritual charms without it impacting the rest of the rules.

Another possibility is to restrict the spell selection of adepts, forbidding them from learning some of the more extravagant spells, such as Flaming Missiles, Enlarge, and Weather Dome. Attacking their victims with cunning curses and malevolent spirits is more in keeping with the ritual magic genre than unleashing a rain of fire and stone.

Spirit Mastery

Ritual magic is often identified with the summoning and mastering of spirits. GMs may wish to combine all spirit related spells into a "Path of Spirits." The spells most appropriate for such a path are: Affect Spirits, Animate Shadow, Animation, Astral Block, Astral Vision, Awaken Craft Spirit, Banish, Bind Spirit, Command Spirit, Control Elemental, Control Gate, Create Elemental, Create Gate, Entrap Spirit, Materialize, Pentagram, Planar Summons, Planar Visit,

Plane Shift, Plane Shift Other, Repel Spirits, Resurrection, Scry Gate, Sense Spirit, Skull-Spirit, Solidify, Soul Jar, Summon Demon, Summon Elemental, Summon Spirit, and Turn Spirit.

In a world where all magic derives from the spirits, spirit-spells might be the only ones adepts could cast, relying upon various spirits to perform the actions that on other worlds wizards perform themselves (such as healing or summoning rain). In such a setting, the Path of Spirits would probably be split up into various paths that relate to the kinds of spirits invoked, so that, for example, there might be the general Path of Spirits with multipurpose spells such as Astral Vision and Banish, the Path of Elemental Air, which has Control, Create, and Summon Air Elemental, the Path of Ghosts which includes such spells as Skull-Spirit and Command Spirit (ghost), and the Path of Demons which has Summon Demon, Planar Visit (Hell), etc.

Ritual Magic in the Campaign

As a more subtle and toned-down form of magic, ritual magic is appropriate for a low-magic setting where spell-casters are more likely to manipulate from the shadows than fight in the forefront with fireballs and lightning bolts. The length of time it takes to perform rituals makes many combat spells impractical, forcing mages to direct their talents in other areas, such as knowledge acquisition and mental domination.

It also brings magic more inline with how it is presented in horror, swords & sorcery, and similar genres, not to mention real-world beliefs. It makes magic more difficult to perform and more mysterious, and thus makes it more potent by comparison. It is difficult to remain impressed by the supernatural if it becomes released at every opportunity, often taking the role of heavy artillery. It is far easier if the power of magic is felt more rarely and quietly, when each ritual is an important event, its results become even more important.

Moving Performances

Sensies for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Paul Stefko

Melissa wiped her hands on her skirt. She always got nervous before a performance, and this would be her most important show ever. Live sensie performance was a dying art; few bothered to develop the skill necessary to create memory in real-time. The audience was dwindling, but Melissa still managed to draw several thousand people to the outdoor stadium.

She peeked out from behind the curtain to look at the crowd sprawled on blankets up the slope of the hill. They looked young and eager; hopefully, at least some of them would remember what she had to show them today.

The music began, and the announcer's voice rumbled from the conduction strips below the stage. The computer sewn into her blouse began scanning crowd response, reading the audience's excitement. "Ready to go, boss," it whispered through her interface.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I give you . . . Mnemosyne!"

Melissa stepped out onto the stage, smiling weakly and waving to the crowd. At center stage, a large padded seat had been placed, and Melissa gratefully settled into it. She cleared her mind and drew forth the first images of her set: 13 human forms, floating in a dark purple liquid, connected one to the next by thick tubes.

As she shut down her own senses in preparation for her broadcast, she felt the rifle shot like a bee sting on her right breast. Even with her last breath, she knew she had enough life left for a burst transmission. Someone out there had to understand; someone had to remember . . .

Powers gives us the Sensie enhancement for the Telecommunication advantage, turning a communication medium into a potential artistic medium. This article explores the possibilities of sensie production, including an artistic skill and options for generating, transmitting, and receiving sensies.

New Skill

Artist (Sensie)
IQ/Hard
Default: IQ-6, Artist (Illusion)-4, or Artist (other)-6
Prerequisite: Telecommunication with the Sensie enhancement, or reliable access to equipment that replicates the effects of the advantage

You are trained in the creation of sensory recordings, or "sensies." This is an intensive process requiring all five senses. This requires about 10 times the length of the sensie ie, a six-minute sensie would require an hour of work. You can roll at -4 to halve this time or -8 to create in "real time."

Modifiers: Equipment modifiers (page 345 of the ***Basic Set,*** if your ability to transmit is based on technology); physiology modifiers (p. 181 of the ***Basic Set,*** halved if your ability to transmit has the Universal enhancement); +2 if you possess Eidetic Memory (+4 on a successful IQ roll); +6 if you possess Photographic Memory.

The Halls of Memory

A sensie could be an entirely original creation, but as with all art, the best product is built on the artist's personal

experience. The problem with sensies is that the average person cannot recall their own experiences so thoroughly as to make them suitable for sensie transmission. Typically, a sensie will not feel more "real" if the artist incorporates authentic experience than it would if he had developed it from scratch.

But the Eidetic Memory and Photographic Memory advantages can grant a sensie artist the edge in creating sensies "based on actual events." GMs should consider allowing the following special enhancement for Eidetic Memory and Photographic Memory:

Sensory: You can recall events with the sensory clarity necessary for sensie transmission. This allows you to transmit memories via Telecommunication with the Sensie enhancement, not just real time experience. In addition, you get a bonus (+2 for Eidetic Memory or +4 with a successful IQ roll; +6 for Photographic Memory) to the following skills: Acting, when using a method that calls for drawing performance from personal experience; Writing or Poetry when integrating personal experience into your narrative or poem; and Artist (Sensie) when integrating your own memory into an original work. +20%.

If your memory only stores experience, you may take the following special limitation. This can represent digital media that can store sensie data or other means of recalling experience.

Sensory Only: Your memory can easily recall experiences, but not learned knowledge. For some reason, your mind does not capture time spent studying, so you cannot recall moments spent, for instance, reading a book. This limitation includes the effects of the Sensory enhancement, but none of the effects of the normal advantage. -40%.

Seeing Through Another's Eyes

A sensie artist may want to use another person's memory as a basis for his art. Assuming the subject does not possess Sensie Telecommunication, this requires the Mind Probe advantage with the Sensory enhancement. If the subject is willing, the GM should wave any Quick Contest and allow the exchange to occur freely.

A less scrupulous sensie artist may try to steal another's memory. This is a more traditional use of Mind Probe. The length of the memory extracted is dependent on the margin of success, at a rate set by the GM; a good default is 30 seconds per point.

If you can only draw out experiences, apply the Sensory Only limitation given above for Eidetic Memory to Mind Probe, rather than the Sensory enhancement.

Picking up The Signal

None of the variants of Telecommunication with the exception of Telesend can receive and interpret sensie signals unaided. The following enhancement can be applied to any form of Telecommunication except Telesend:

Sensie Receiver: You can receive and interpret sensory transmissions. While experiencing such a transmission, your natural senses are suppressed, with the exception of any force that deals damage. You can turn off the sensie and return to your normal senses at will. +40%.

If your Telecommunication can only transmit sensies, add the following limitation instead of the Sensie enhancement:

Sensie Only: You can only transmit sensory experience. This still allows verbal communication, but all messages must be spoken clearly aloud. -10%.

The Pleasure and the Pain

Some sensie artists can unlock the emotional core of extreme experiences. This allows the artist to transmit a feeling of euphoria (or agony) with their sensies. This can be modeled by an Affliction with the Agony or Ecstasy enhancements.

If the artist's sensies are addictive, the Affliction should have a Disadvantage (Addiction) enhancement as well.

Sensie Packages

The following perks and metatraits provide packaged advantages for various systems of sensie production and use:

Cybernetic: You transmit and receive sensies via a radio implant. You also possess "headware memory" that can store sensie information, including automatic recording of your own sensory data. Telecommunction (Radio; Sensie, +80%; Sensie Receiver +40%) [22], Photographic Memory (Sensory Only, -40%) [6]. 28 points.

Memory Thief: Your sensies are actually stolen memories. You do not possess Mind Reading and therefore must touch your subject to activate Mind Probe. If your subject is unwilling, you must restrain him or knock him unconscious. Once you have stolen a memory, you can transmit it again by touch, along with an addictive euphoria. Mind Probe (Sensory Only, -40%) [12], Photographic Memory (Sensory Only, -40%) [6], Telecommunication (Telesend; Burst, x10, +30%; Link, +10%; Sensie Only, -10%; Sense-Based, Touch, -20%) [33], Affliction 1 (Based on Will, +20%; Ecstasy, +100%; Link, +10%; Contact Agent, -30%) [20], Affliction 1 (Based on Will, +20%; Disadvantage, Addiction, +20%; Extended Duration, Permanent, +150%; Link, +10%; Contact Agent, -30%) [27]. 98 points.

Sensehead: You have a slot in your head that allows you to process pre-recorded sensie chips. If you possess a Modular Ability (Chip Slots) that allows mental traits, a sensie chip can occupy one of your slots and can hold a number of sensie recordings equal to the number of points available in that slot. If you do not have Chip Slots, you can slot a sensie chip containing a single recording. 1 point.

Sense Memory: You can identify an individual based on the specific "feel" in sensies of his experiences. This also allows you to determine a specific sensie artist responsible for an original creation. Whenever encountering a new source or artist, make an IQ roll to memorize their sensie "signature." 1 point.

Using Sensies in the Campaign

Science Fiction: Sensies originated in cyberpunk and post-cyberpunk literature. Usually in these settings, sensies are cheap and addictive but legal (Sensie Addiction would be worth -15 points). For more ideas, see *Cyberworld* and the *Transhuman Space* line.

Horror/Psionics: A sensie "artist" using the Memory Thief package above could make for a terrifying villain in a horror game with exotic abilities. This would be an interesting starting point for a psychic vampire (see the Vampirism power on page 135 of *Powers*).

Fantasy: Imagine a college of bards who can fill their audience's heads and hearts with vivid imagery just by singing or delivering a speech. This could be Telesend (Sense-Based, Hearing; Sensie) and requiring a successfull Public Speaking or Singing roll.

Pyramid Review

Hidden Conflict: A Customizable, Strategy, Tile-Game

Published by [Twilight Creations, Inc.](#)

Designed by Kerry Breitenstein with Todd A. Breitenstein

Box Illustrated by Jim Pavelec

Illustrated by Ralph Horsley, Chris Martinez, Sean Parrack, Jim Pavelec, Terry Pavlet, Chad Sergesketter, & Tony Steele

240 1¾-inch full color tiles, six cheat/reference cards, & eight-page b&w rulebook; $19.99

The majority of games from Twilight Creations have seen the players battling hordes of zombies or monsters across a field of randomly drawn tiles representing a town, an army base, a shopping mall, and a dark, *dark* wood. With their latest release, Twilight Creations give the tile-laying game a twist by making the tiles what you fight with. Designed for two to six players, ***Hidden Conflict*** is a war or skirmish game in which the tiles are both fought over and fought with, and which also possesses a managed, almost constrained random element.

The set-up is simple. While mankind has been busy warring with itself, the true enemies of humanity have been gathering. Now they stand ready to launch an apocalyptic assault, and whoever survives and wins, gains control of the Earth.

What you get matches the simplicity of the set-up. Some 240 tiles are divided into six color-coded forty-tile factions and a cheat or reference card for each faction. The rulebook though is not as explanatory as it should be. Even better, Twilight Creations have assigned a different artist to illustrate each faction, which very nicely gives each faction a singular look. The six factions are in turn, Demons, Ghouls, Humans, Vampires, Werewolves, and Zombies.

The tiles come in three types: Fighters, Events, and Items. Each Fighter has a Level rating from one to six (each Level 1 Fighter representing a Faction's Leader), an attack and defense value, plus a Special Ability. For example, "Fast" lets a Fighter to attack first, while "Scout" enables a Fighter to examine an adjacent un-revealed face down tile. Other Special Abilities allow a Fighter to resist weaker opponents, aid another Fighter, and even hide before a battle begins.

Events are divided between Instants that have an immediate effect and those that can be saved for later use. For example, "Daybreak" is an Instant that removes all exposed "night" creatures -- Ghouls, Vampires, and Werewolves, from play. Its counterpart, "Scatter," sends all exposed "day" creatures -- Demons, Ghouls, and Humans, into hiding face down amongst the other tiles. "Lost" can be saved and used later to cancel a Fighter's Special Ability, while "Hypnosis" lets a player temporarily control an enemy Fighter. Items, available only to the Ghoul and Human factions add weapons and armor, and need to be attached to a specific Fighter.

A game starts with what seems initially a complex set-up process. Not all of a faction's tiles are used in a game, the more players involved, the fewer the number of tiles used -- either 29 for a two-player game, 25 for three players, and 20 for four to six players. A player chooses these from the forty tiles in his faction, discarding the rest. He then selects five Fighters as his starting force, one of which has to be the Leader tile. Then everyone's are mixed together face down in the middle of the table. From this morass, the tiles are collected together into stacks three tiles deep. These stacks are used to create a square or rectangular "tile" board. This then forms the game's playing surface.

On a turn a player sends up to three Fighters to each attack the top tile on one of the "tile" board's stacks. These tiles are turned over and resolved. If an Event, this either happens immediately, or is passed to the player whose faction color matches that of the revealed tile. It can then be used later in the game. If a Fighter from an opposing side, then combat is resolved in a simple comparison of attack and defense values, killed Fighters entering the Graveyard from where they might be resurrected. All revealed surviving Fighters are returned to their players' hand. After Events and Combat, a player can move his Fighters around the "tile" board. Play continues like this until the last Leader is left standing, its player being the winner.

Which all seems so simple, and it is. Except that the device of the stacked "tile" board adds both a random element and one of unpredictable exploration. Both, of course, are partly predetermined by the players. Further, because the combat mechanics are so simple, the game play focuses on the effects of both the Events and the Special Abilities on the Fighter tiles. That the Events vary slightly from one faction to the next adds to the replay value and gives ***Hidden Conflict*** its customizable aspect. Understanding how both work will grant the players the winning edge.

Unfortunately ***Hidden Conflict*** is let down by an underwritten rulebook and not really being that interesting a game for either two or three players. More participants means a greater the variety of tiles in play, and results in more things going on. Although this is very much a war game, the design of ***Hidden Conflict*** with its interesting use of tiles does much to hide this fact and make it more palatable to the non-war gamer. It is also this clever design that gives the game its high replay value and opens it up to further expansions, some of which are already planned. ***Hidden Conflict*** may look simple, but in keeping with the title, keeps its challenges and strategies concealed until the battle begins.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Fury of Dracula, Second Edition

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Designed by Stephen Hand & Kevin Wilson

Edited by James Torr

Art & Graphics by Andrew Navaro, Scott Nicely, Kevin Wilson, Ed Bourelle, Anders Finer, Wes Louie, Megan Stringfellow, Mike Capprotti, Aaron Habibipour, & Guy Gentry

Full-color boxed set, two to five players; rules, board, five plastic miniatures, five character sheets, reference map, four dice (one specialized for rail travel), 220 cards (items, events, tactics, locations, powers, & reference), & 81 counters; $49.95

Fantasy Flight Games has spent the last couple of years gearing up to re-release some old gaming favorites. Sandwiched between *Arkham Horror* and *Britannia* is the old Games Workshop piece *Fury of Dracula.* As in so many of his movies, the vampire wasn't destroyed at the end of the novel (that's the game's backstory and they're sticking to it) . . . he survived to vex his old enemies once again, eight years later.

The object of the game is to destroy Count Dracula (if you're playing the hunters) or to infest Earth with your vampire hordes (if you're the Prince of Darkness).

The action plays out on a map of Europe, nearby Asia, and the surrounding seas. Cities are all connected by roads, and most by rail as well. The players use pawns representing the famed protagonists -- Lord Godalming, Dr. Seward, and others -- to show their progress from town to town. Dracula wanders the same map, but his location is tracked secretly by playing corresponding location cards, and he sets fiendish plots in motion as he goes. Hunters can only corner him by stumbling upon his trail, but they'll spend more time cleaning up devilish messes like outbreaks of plague, packs of ravenous wolves, hoaxes in the newspaper, minions doing Dracula's bidding, and the all-important vampiric servants who ultimately win him the game.

The places/cards he's been to remain on the board, shifting along a track, and if his pursuers come across such a locale they must try to foil him or his lingering plots. Eventually cards fall off the end of the track to show the trail has gone cold, and any encounter marker on that card may be "matured" -- that is, a long-standing plot has come to fruition, and Dracula gets some added benefit from it. If the fiend hasn't been there, the hunters may use the town to rest and grab item or event cards.

Items are the usual fare you'd expect when dogging a bloodsucker: garlic, stakes, holy hosts, crucifixes, and some mundane bits like pistols and knives (better against his minions than the "man" himself). Event cards have symbols on the back to show whether they assist the good guys or bad guys, but they're drawn blind from the bottom of the deck, so getting them is a calculated risk. These may provide new allies in the fight, news stories that narrow down the villain's location, or one-time attacks or effects.

Each round, time passes; half the game happens in the daytime, half at night, and Dracula has the advantage in the

dark. Combat has modified rock-paper-scissors elements, and players choose from three basic tactic cards: dodge, punch, and escape. Hunters can collect weapons that give them new options, and the Prince of Darkness has several moves he can pull only at night like Mesmerize and Strength. Everyone compares initiative rolls on six-sided dice, and the winner's card is used to decide the outcome. Players may escape, take damage in the form of health or blood points (depending on whether they're human), get bitten, or lose their weapons. Eventually the team will track down Dracula and kill him, or the Count's vampire legions will overrun Europe, ending the game.

Fantasy Flight's reputation is one of high component quality, but in this game they've outdone themselves. Every piece is a tiny work of art, every card a stylish rendition, each character sheet a masterpiece. The map board uses sepia tones that suggest a period illustration, although this also makes distinguishing between the similar colors (land and sea zones) harder to get used to, but it's still a gorgeous picture and a lovely effort all around.

Some bad points: Some of the counters are exceedingly small and could be lost with a solid sneeze, a careless hand, or poor accounting. The event cards are either "keep" or "use immediately," and it seems awfully easy to get an immediate card that only works if certain conditions are met -- qualities that can easily not be there, gouging you out of a valuable opportunity. Fights can take a while, and wearing down a hunter or Dracula is balanced to the point of being frustrating. And the most disappointing factor: This . . . is a *looong* game. Both the heroes and villains stand to advance when the game goes through a full cycle of day and night, but this can feel like forever (the game is an all-night affair). There are several options, especially for Dracula, to manipulate events to one's advantage, but it just doesn't feel like you're really in control of your game.

There are a number of differences between the old and new versions. The card trail is a much improved way to track Drac (he used to move on his own map hidden behind a screen), though the "history" he leaves makes it far easier for hunters to work out where he is. The chances of drawing the critical vampire encounters were marginally better in the previous set, but this one gives you greater freedom (you spend blood points instead of drawing the right event card) to exchange chits. Combat once used an unwieldy grid to cross-reference attack forms, so having it all on cards is a blessing. The game is now for five players, not just four, having added Mina Harker into the mix. Oh, and the definite article "the" has been removed from the title.

Whether you're a fan of the first edition and can't find it on eBay or want to see a good idea given a smoother execution, **Fury of Dracula** is a fine reworking that adds enough to make it worth a second look (even if you do own the original). It hasn't lost that sense of true nail-biting excitement, and the cat-and-mouse game is tenser than ever. New options (for both sides of the struggle) add strategy and urgency, so you may not know if you're the hunter or the hunted, but you will be among the entertained.

--Andy Vetromile

Things I Love As A Player

We're rounding up the first [quadrology](#) of [love](#)-[hate](#) columns by taking a look at some of the things I love as a player. (If I haven't stressed it enough in the past, I've only been focusing this series on things that I love when *game companies* do them. Yes, I hate it when GMs kidnap my dog and scratch "PIGGY" on my car with their keys . . . but that's usually beyond the control of the game publishers, and might be the focus of another column series.)

Let us begin!

Strange settings that give their information as directly as possible. I'll be honest; I *want* to like a lot more unusual game worlds than I actually do. There are so many bizarre game settings that seem like they'd be interesting -- cool covers, neat gear, interest-piquing passages throughout the book -- but I just can't connect with. I suspect the primary reason, for me, is that many games do a poor job of summing up what, exactly, they're about.

In this way, movies and television shows have a tremendous advantage over the written word, since it's easy to convey a tremendous amount of information visually. In 30 seconds of footage, it's trivial to convey the kind of world that, say, *Star Trek, Star Wars, Who Framed Roger Rabbit,* or *Fifth Element;* compare this with some unusual RPG settings, where you can read a 10-page introductory story and still not know what the game is about.

In pondering my column for this week, I think I stumbled upon one of the reasons. Many games do a poor job of bringing the reader up to speed on what a game is about, both in terms of the specifics of the game world and the tone of that setting. Unfortunately, most games don't do this effectively; it's a sad state of affairs when I try reading a new setting, only to give up after 10 minutes or so and go online to find a review of that product, so I can determine what it's about.

Most recently, this happened with the ***Eberron*** campaign setting; after reading it for a good number of pages, I still had no idea why most of the material there couldn't have been plunked down in a ***Forgotten Realms*** setting. And, actually, I was pretty surprised by my disconnect with the setting, since previous ***Dungeons & Dragons*** settings had all done *extremely* good jobs in establishing a tone almost immediately: ***Dark Suns, Ravenloft, Spelljammer,*** and (to a lesser extent) ***Planescape.***

So I love games that I'm able to pick up and explain -- or have explained to me -- as quickly as absolutely possible. Some other games that spring to mind as being good at bringing a player up to speed as fast as possible:

- ***Aberrant:*** Since it's one of the few supers games that actually tells its backstory using comic book elements, it was incredibly easy to get drawn into this world. It's a near-future low-sci-fi supers setting, where supers are treated as celebrities.
- ***Vampire: The Masquerade:*** This game had the advantage that everyone knows what vampires are, and it doesn't disappoint on those expectations (unlike the similarly themed ***Werewolf: The Apocalypse,*** which spends 90% of its opening telling the reader that everything they know about werewolves is wrong).
- ***Shadowrun:*** Again, this game -- in all its iterations -- wears its intentions on its sleeve (or, in this case, cover); it promises a cyberpunk game with trolls and elves, and it delivers it from page one. I think it also helps that the name of the game is also the name of the primary type of missions -- and once you know what a shadowrun is, you're 90% of the way toward understanding what ***Shadowrun*** is. Sadly, most future supplements seem to rely *waaaaay* too much on knowledge of the setting's nuances and terminology to have the same draw-in appeal, but the core book has universally been incredibly approachable.

I could spend time muttering about games that fail to live up to this "explain things as quickly as possible" ethos (***Fading Suns,*** I'm looking at you), but for now I'll just content myself with basking in the memories of those games where I could scan a few pages and be filled with a sense of the world and the compulsion to keep turning pages.

Boxed sets. Yes, I know they've gone the way of the dodo, and I understand the economic forces that caused their extinction. But I don't care; I still love the old RPG boxed sets. In a time when my budget (a.k.a. "being a kid at

home") meant that I'd only be getting one or two RPG products every six months or so, a boxed set was able to multiply that delight times the number of products in the box. And some of those boxed sets -- such as the **DC Heroes, Ghostbusters,** and **Planescape** ones -- proved to be near-endless bounties of goodies.

Fortunately, I take some solace in realizing that those beloved boxes are somewhat replicated by the proclivity of web exclusives and "enhancements"; a fat hardcover and a few interesting PDF documents go a long way toward recreating that experience. But even so, nothing quite compares to cracking the plastic on a new game and never knowing *what* will come tumbling out.

Game books that include interesting powers. I think one of the biggest complaints I have against the stock **d20 System** is that, for the most part, a vast majority of the abilities, feats, skills, powers, and spells are devoted to . . . well, killing monsters. I remember finally getting to hold Wizards of the Coast's **Epic Level Handbook** in my anxious little hands; this book finally introduced spells higher than 9th level for the **Dungeons & Dragons** game. So, like any good munchkin, I immediately tried to find out what the highest-level spell they had devised. What wonders would it behold? And there it was: *vengeful gaze of god.* The effects of this? 305d6 in damage to the target, 200d6 of damage to the casterrrrzzzz . . . <snerk> sorry. Dozed off. Yes, the most powerful, mightiest spell does . . . a whole lot of damage. Yee-haw.

Let's compare this with the highest-level ability for Obfuscate, from the **Vampire: The Masquerade** game. (Obfuscate, as the name suggests, is the art of remaining hidden: false faces, turning invisible, and so on.) Anyway, the most powerful ability -- the name of which I'm not certain of, because the book's buried in the bottom of a stack of boxes -- will completely remove all evidence of the user's existence from the Earth: all mention of him from documents, all memory of him from minds, and so on.

Now, the GM in me notes that this ability immediately evokes an adventure or two . . . most of them revolving around a third-act revelation that the mysterious stranger the party has recently met up with was, in fact, a part of their lives for the entire length of the campaign (they just don't remember him). But, even though that high-level power would never be within reach of a normal **Vampire** campaign, the player in me loves *all* the Obfuscate abilities -- hiding in shadows, having a supernatural disguise, and so on. In fact, most of the **Vampire** abilities are evocative to me; being able to rewrite memories, compel people to bow before your majesty, being able to summon and talk to animals, and so on.

This is important, since, to me, being able to deal a lot of damage isn't a compelling enough "neat-o" ability for a character. Speaking solely for myself, I like to connect with my characters' abilities to do things that otherwise are very difficult or impossible for others, and I don't get enough of that connection with most of the **d20 System** abilities, no matter *how* they're gussied up to appear different:

"I'm able to deal 4d6 damage every other round using two weapons!"
"With my mighty striking blow, I'm able to increase my chances of a successful strike by +2, turning the resultant points to additional damage!"
"I'm able to reflect one blow a day back upon the attacker, dealing it damage from an unexpected source!"

And so on.

Anyway, I understand that the audiences for the **d20 System** and the various **World of Darkness** products are vastly different, and I know that the former would definitely be fun to me in the right circumstances. But when it comes to having that "gee, whiz!" desire to play a character, I know I always am more attracted to weird abilities compared to powerful ones.

* * *

Well, that's it for this installment. As ever, feel free to make your loves known by e-mail or the *Pyramid* discussion boards. In the meantime, keep on spreading the love in all ways that are legal.

--Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

![?]

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

![?]

Irregular Webcomic

![?]

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Deephome

by Anders D. Nygaard

Listening

Cold mountain sun caresses the gates of the dwarven freehold of K'brea as Senior Engineer Hecrak hen Ki surveys his troops. His name, a whole syllable longer than his father's, marks him as a self-dug dwarf, one who has descended to his post by craftsmanship rather than breeding.

This close to the surface, the gatekeepers can smell the in-draft, carrying autumn frost, wood smoke, and blood. On the plain, the pitiful human sun-shelters have been burned. He no longer needs to touch the stone to feel it; the buzz of hundreds, thousands of kobold vermin reach him even through his boots, nearly drowning out the usual hum of the living belowcity. They look to him now. He has seen his four centuries. His sons have already passed him, and carry names of three or even four syllables. As good a day for a glorious death as any.

As far as visiting researchers have been able to work things out, the age of brass and steam arrived a little over a dwarven generation ago in the world known to Infinity as Kenner, an attempt at rendering the local word for "Deep-home." The web of trade between the depholds had been steadily growing for centuries until it reached a critical point. Then technological development exploded like a heavy mining charge.

Long held craft secrets were suddenly freely exchanged. Unimagined wonders and horrors saw the gaslight of the greathalls. Soon, they were brought into the sunny world of elf and man. Eager man-lords and elven thanes brought new wealth and exotic wares to the dwarves as they scrambled for toys, tools and war golems. Those who tried to cheat a dwarf soon learned what it meant to earn the enmity of an entire clan.

Of course, it couldn't last. More than a century ago, a dwarf known only as Pneu'chun-ra, the Steamlord, rose to the position of clanfather of the ruling faction in the great freehold of K-thoa, Deep-Glitter. Within a year, his Low Engineers held the freehold in an iron grip. Within a decade, the surrounding freeholds surrendered or had their gates crushed with steam hammers, their mines penetrated by armored moles, and their guards slaughtered by golem warriors. While some strongholds held out, most fell to other threats once isolated and deprived of the support of the rest of dwarfdom. The last free city, K'brea, was laid waste by a kobold horde in the twentieth year of the Steamlord.

Dwarven Castes

Kenner is a strangely divided world: At first sight its inhabitants are the regular cast of fantasy tropes, scrubbing by at tech levels 1-3. However once you get underground, you'll rarely drop below TL4, and will likely run into TL5 devices sooner than later. For purposes of calculating point values, assume TL3 as an average. In dwarven society, technological knowledge, skill and (curiously) personal tech level form the bedrock of what other races would call political power. Status levels range from the powerful Low Engineers at status 4-5 to the pariah Stonecunner mystics at -2 or less.

To make a dwarven character, use the template in the Basic Set, but add either Social Stigma (Disowned) or at least a total of 15 points worth of Allies, Contacts, Social Regard, or other appropriate clan related advantages and disadvantages. Many have an Intolerance of "primitives" (anyone of lower tech level, including other dwarves) at Quirk level or higher. Clan members generally train within their clan, and belong to the same occupational caste. Unless you prefer to play a common worker or a free dwarf in exile among humans or elves, give your dwarf a place in his community by adding one of the following templates:

Low Engineer   *57 points*

Advantages: TL5 [10]; Status 5 [25] and one of either Legal Enforcement Powers 3 [15] or Military Rank 3 [15]

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Professional) [-5]; Duty (to Steamlord) [minimum -5]

Skills: Either Axe/Mace, Axe/Mace Art, Axe/Mace Sport or Thrown Weapon (Axe/Mace) [4]; No less than [4] points in either Accounting or Leadership and [8] points in Engineer. Remember to add at least [1] point for the Mathematics prerequisite. Common Engineer specialties include Steam Engine, Clockwork, Mining and Robotics; some with knowledge of the latter also dabble in Alchemy or Chemistry, but known alchemists may lose considerable renown and respect.

The Low Engineers are the Steamlord's governors, administrators, planners and commanders, and have accordingly been given the right and honor of taking five-syllable names, and given instruction in the deepest secrets of technology; only the common workers are required to use all these syllables when addressing them (Stonecunners are not supposed to speak to them at all), and higher ranks are permitted increasing degrees of familiarity. At least three will be present in a Steamhold at any time. They carry golden tablets with inscriptions detailing their authority counted, according to their skill set, in number of Master Engineers and machinery, or Gatekeepers and golems they are entitled to command. Very senior Low Engineers may possess several such tablets, giving him both civil and military authority.

To make a Master or Apprentice engineer, use the above template, but remember that none of these have any military authority. Reduce their Legal Enforcement Power to two or one, accordingly. Exchange Accounting or Leadership with an appropriate Mechanic or similar practical skill. Many Engineers are trained in artistic skills as well, with common specialties being Calligraphy, Illumination, and Sculpture. Many are Connoisseurs, and some of them can get quite fanatical about their pet crafts, but none of these skills are requirements.

Master Gatekeeper   *63 points*

Gatekeeper

Advantages: TL4 [5]; Status 4 [10]; Legal Enforcement Powers 2[10]; Military Rank 2 [10] and at least [20] points worth of Languages, Cultural Familiarity, Charisma, Combat Reflexes or Wealth.

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Soldier's) [-10]

Quirks: Some Gatekeepers get sunburns, which are good for a [-1] point temporary Social Stigma until it clears up, when it becomes a negative Reputation of equal value (good for the occasional jab, but no real liability). A gatekeeper who works outside enough to keep up a permanent tan might aquire a Social Stigma or bad Reputation by becoming known as a "high dwarf," worth [-5] points.

Skills: Diplomacy [2]; Merchant [2] and [4] points either in Forgery, Counterfeiting and Smuggling or Detect Lies, Interrogation and Tactics. Two combat skill sets are available. Some gatekeeper clans still train in the traditional martial arts, while others employ a range of newer inventions.

The former have at least: Axe/Mace [4]; Crossbow [2]; Fast Draw [1]; Shield [1] and either Brawling, Boxing or Wrestling [2], with no less than five points in Techniques.

The latter learns either Knife, Shortsword or Saber at [1] point as a backup in case Artillery or Gunner (Cannon) [2], Guns (Musket) [2] and Battlesuit [2] isn't sufficient. Though not formally taught, most have acquired considerable experience worth at least [3] points of Mechanics and Operation skills through surviving various trials and catastrophic failures. A very few may have acquired forbidden Engineer knowledge through a little unofficial destruct-testing of advanced equipment assigned to them.

The gatekeepers make up the deepholds' soldier caste, and are the ones most frequently encountered above ground. Traditionally, they are supposed to defend the gates of their home city. But the Steamlord's novel thinking has resulted in the definition of "gate" being somewhat extended, sometimes to include rather large fiefdoms, inhabited by whole nations of the savage races. Some master gatekeepers engage in sporadic attempts to aid these unfortunates in bettering themselves as much as their inferior pneumas allow, condemned as they are to a pitiful existence under the merciless glare of the sun and the pitiless rage of the elements. Results are mixed, to say the least. A Master Gatekeeper answers to a Low Engineer, but are usually given rather free reins as long as they are operating at the gates and are not engaged in actual war; underground operations may see quite keen interest taken by the Engineers, who dislike having their projects disrupted, be it by invasion, riot or just general unrest.

The Masters hold a rank comparable to a sergeant, but often receive the responsibilities of anything from captain to commander, with additional duties of diplomat and customs inspector, depending on how preoccupied their superiors happen to be at the moment. To make a regular gatekeeper, halve the points available for advantages and skills and reduce Status, Military Rank and Legal Enforcement Powers accordingly.

Master Stonecunner

9 points

Advantages: Legal Immunity 1 [5] and at least [30] points worth of Spirit Empathy, Ritual Magery, Visualization, Sensitive Touch, Subsonic Hearing, Universal Digestion, or Vibration Sense.

Disadvantages: TL1 [-10]; Wealth -3 [-25] Second-Class Citizen [-5]; Status [-2]; Disciplines of Faith (Asceticism and Ritualism) [-20]

Skills: [16] points in Symbol Drawing (Stonecunner Runes), Ritual Magic (Stonecunners) and Hidden Lore (Dwarven Mythology). Stonecunners only learn one path from their Master, but learn it well; [8] points invested in either of the Path of Earth, Making and Breaking or Animism, as well as another [8] in the most useful rituals of his path. Most stonecunners have at least [4] points in more mundane medical and craft skills.

The stonecunners are vital to the deepholds. They know the way of deep, and can speak to the anima of the mountain, finding safe shafts, new seams, preventing cave-ins and warning of trapped fire or choking pneumas. Stonecunners are carriers of an ancient tradition of spirit magic, as old as dwarfdom itself, keepers of secrets no one uninitiated are allowed to even know the existence of. The oldest and wisest of them are rumored to be able to become one with the bedrock itself, walking through seams of iron ore or granite as if wading down a stream. Despite their presence in every deephold and the indispensable position they hold in dwarven society, they are almost universally feared and despised; walking the corridors of both worker's sleeping halls and engineer quarters, they endure insults like "talkers to ceilings," "rockfeet," and "sunbringers," and subsist on alms and scraps. Few dwarves would really dare to raise a hand to one of them, though this taboo has been eroding in recent years. While belonging to a pariah caste, they are no more numerous than the Low Engineers, and recruit among the clanless, outcast or disabled.

The Pneumatic and the Mechanical Paradigms

What may or may not be immediately apparent to outtimers will sooner or later become painfully obvious: There's something strange about Kenner's physical laws. Almost everything on this world appears to operate in roughly the same way as on homeline; things fall down, gunpowder explodes, hot steam expands, and fire burns. They just don't do it for the same reasons. Kenner is a high-mana, animist world; everything here has a spirit of its own. Most are dormant, reacting on reflex, making predictions and extrapolations of physical laws possible. But those who know the secret can awaken these Anima. Sometimes, they even wake up for reasons of their own. And when they do, all bets are off.

However, the majority of dwarves cling to the idea that their world operates on predictable, mechanical principles, even though they sometimes encounter powerful anima, in particular in the deep mines. These mineral and fire elementals, called "pneuma" by the dwarves, are generally written off as naturally occurring phenomena or hallucinations. One of the Steamlord's dirtiest secrets is the debt his numerous engineering feats owe to more than a little knowledge of alchemy and the stonecunner's craft.

The stonecunners tell tales of a mythic age, when the dwarves knew reliable Stone, not fickle Air as their true element and walked through the deeps like the high ones walk under the sun, free of the suffocating rock and forever safe from the raging elements above. The Song of Sacrilege, taught from master to apprentice stonecunner, tells the story of the blinding of dwarfdom, and how the stonecunners became keepers of the sacred truth. Some of its verses are important parts of stonecunner rituals, reminding dormant anima of ancient pacts and half-forgotten names.

The Path of Animism

This Ritual Magic Path involves contacting, communicating with or controlling spirits possessing inanimate objects or living creatures. On worlds with numerous and strong spirits, it could be the only or one of a few paths necessary to succeed as a ritual magician; the GM is free to adjust the available spells to his game world, from a selection comparable to the other schools or paths of magic, to covering the entire spectrum for high-mana worlds. Any magical effect which could be explained as an act of a spirit possessing an object is a candidate for inclusion in this school. Thus a powerful version of this path might, for example, include a selection of Animate, Awaken, Banish, Command, Control, Cure, Divination, Find, Repel, Sense and Summon spells, but exclude most "flashy" spells, like fireballs and invisibility.

Technological Marvels and McGuffins

The highest achievements of dwarven technology is comparable in style (if not in efficiency) to that of Victorian England. However, it is rather erratically applied, with few systematic attempts at industrial mass production. The state of affairs is partly due to the animist magic component in most of their high-tech machinery, requiring the personal attention of the Steamlord and his closest, Status 6 Low Engineers for any of these designs to function reliably. Pre-Steamlord dwarves would have recoiled in horror at the mere idea of mass production, seeing it as a horrific insult against their craftsman's honor to let anything less than perfection leave their workshops. This leaves dwarfdom in general at an average of TL4. The Steamlord is in fact familiar with large parts of the Song of Sacrilege, and has embarked on a campaign of uniting the two paradigms of pneuma and machinery. A slow, but steady progress of sorts is being made; the GM should be able to introduce any gadget of the age of steam or steampunk literature he feels his campaign needs.

Some characteristic products coming out of the steamholds might include light battlesuits for gatekeepers on riot duty, occasional robot (golem) servants, muskets and gunpowder charges, airships and gliders, heavy mining equipment, various DaVincian one-of-a-kind experiments, lenses and clockwork, and advanced wind- and water mill designs.

While magnetism is well known, compasses and other navigational tricks are likely to be rare; dwarves don't like to travel far above ground, and make sure they either have no choice or know exactly where they are going. Interest in the night sky is minimal. Gatling guns are a definite possibility, but not in large numbers. Medicine -- in particular anything relating to mining or industrial accidents, respiratory illnesses, and prosthetics -- is fairly advanced; what the Flesh Engineers can't handle, a Stonecunner might have a go at on the side. There's little interest in intellectual pursuits not related to the physical sciences, and aesthetics is practiced only as it applies to the crafts; anything hinting of mysticism is a subject of ridicule, scorn or vicious criticism. Unexplained phenomena are acknowledged, but it is assumed that the Low Engineers will soon discover the perfectly logical explanations behind them. Meanwhile, most miners are smart enough to listen to a stonecunner's advice.

Adventures Below and Above

Exploring the Deephome

Exactly what happens to outtimers who spend time on Kenner should provide years worth of debating material for parachronic science. If the GM assumes a high-tech, no-mana homeline, the characters may find themselves literally soulless in an ensouled world. On the other hand, since the world of Kenner may not even consist of atoms as homeline knows them, all sorts of mayhem -- from super powers to strange reality quakes or immunity to all spirits and spirit magic -- may be justified. Perhaps visits to Kenner are only possible in spirit, as a psychic projection, in a dreaming state or even by being born into a Kennerian body.

Once the outtimers are there, not in immediate danger of having their bodies' atoms start decaying, and, it's presumed, know how to get home, exploration may commence. The Steamlord's domain is a rather obvious target for Centran agents. How to infiltrate a civilization of people half the infiltrator's height is an exercise perhaps best left to the GM's and players' imaginations. Helping a human community attain sufficient respect to be recognized by the dwarven elite as something more than sad mockeries of dwarfdom could be a first step to getting access to deepholds as diplomats or traders. While the highest achievements of Kenner's technology alternates between being too magic-dependent or insufficiently advanced to be of much interest, some interesting results has been reached in metallurgy. Authentic "dwarf-made" artifacts would find eager buyers on a surprisingly large spectrum of worlds, and visitors might not find Kenner's numerous other sapient cultures as uninteresting as the dwarves do.

Maps

Free Dwarves

A small number of dwarven clans escaped the fall of the freeholds. They make a living among the other races as best they can, exploiting their advantages in a number of trades. Long term profits such as moneylending are popular, if risky. Trades which benefit from access to heavy machinery and high precision tools can leave clans with a considerable profit; the lumber trade, construction, and architecture is common, as well as crafts demanding long

apprenticeships and pride in a job well done (such as jewelry, stone carving, clockwork, and toys). The free clans have three castes -- Clanfather, Master and Apprentice -- and answer to no lower authority than the Clanfather. Such a clan could make great contacts and sources of unusual gadgets for a regular fantasy campaign, or expert consultants on dwarven culture for outtimers.

Some free dwarves remember the brass age, and dream of a day when they can be masters of their own deephold again. There are several potential sites, cities abandoned after natural disasters, pests, curses or invasions. The prize above all would, of course, be grand K'brea, the deepest symbol of freehold dwarfdom and, incidentally, a nearly completely impregnable fortress. There are numerous reasons to brave the unknown depths besides wholesale reclamation; consulting ancestral ghosts for lost secrets, recovering technological relics of the brass age, or just searching for lost heirlooms are among the most obvious ones. Solving the mystery of the sudden fall of K'brea could make a band of young apprentices quite famous -- and extremely wanted, should the answer turn out to render the Steamlord's honor in doubt . . .

Mapping the Deephome

Perhaps the world Infinity knows as Kenner isn't the end of it. Who knows how far the dwarves have dug, or where the Stonecunners go when they walk the seams in the deepest shafts? Maybe the underground world of the dwarves forms a timeline in itself, touching on several, or maybe even hundreds of different abovegrounds. What secrets could the dwarves learn from the inhabitants of these strange and far-off lands? Do they even know that the places they dig to aren't all part of the same planet? What if visiting outtimers set the stonecunners on the scent of homeline?

Everyone Loves The Steamlord! The Steamlord Is Thy Friend!

"You are the Steamlord's Chosen! Today, You are the Most Fortunate among Dwarfdom! So listen up, Gatekeepers! On this most efficient of days, *you* have been awarded a mission of the Deepest Significance! Sightings of Traitors, Highdwarves and possible Kobolds with false beards have been reported in sector XXXIV-Blue!!! The Steamlord himself has granted you the Honor of eradicating this threat to the Deephold! Report to Low Engineer M'hdbharsar-hren-Hc for release of equipment Vitally Important to the successful resolution of your Mission! Leeeeeeeeft-hrun! Hwun-too-hree-faah! 'Hi-ho- for the Steamlord we will crush our foe . . . ' Sing it, you kneebiting sons of roofsuckers!"

Echoes Of World War II

by James Ryman Bierly

On September 1, 1939, Nazi troops invaded Poland, and events were set in motion that would change the world forever. The Western world was shaped by the events of World War II on a scale that few other historical events can match. With the second world war came the dawning of the nuclear age, the beginning of the Cold War, and the creation of the nation of Israel and the United Nations. But the war did more than simply change the world's political landscape and create new technologies. It imprinted powerful lessons and themes on our collective consciousness, which have since taken on an almost mythic quality. Echoes of World War II reverberate in many great works of literature, especially genre fiction written in the years since. Let's examine some of those themes and ideas, and consider how they can be applied to a fantasy roleplaying campaign.

The Use Of Great Power Can Create More Problems Than It Solves

The detonation of the atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki brought the second world war to an end. Years of conflict were finally finished and the troops could come home. It was a joyous occasion for the western world. Yet nowadays when those two fateful explosions are spoken of it is often in ominous tones. The Atomic Age brought a new level of fear to all international relations. Now, the entire world could be wiped out with the press of a button., not to mention the thousands of innocents killed in Japan by the bombs themselves. The use of maximum force ended the enemy threat, but spawned a far more deadly danger.

Roleplaying Applications

- Grant the players a useful magic item, but whenever the item is used, the player who used the item suffers in some way. Perhaps she gradually turns to stone, or becomes more evil, or changes into another race.
- While doing spell research, allow a player (or NPC) to create a powerful spell at a fairly low level. After the PC has cast the spell a few times, word will spread of its existence. Mages will come from far and wide to try to learn the spell, and many of them will use force if necessary. Once the technique has been learned by others, players will begin encountering it all over the world. Those mages who know the spell will have a great advantage over those who do not.
- The kingdom the players are allied with is at war with an evil nation. The ruler of the good kingdom discovers a shortcut to victory. Insert the quest of your choice here. But when the shortcut is taken, it unleashes a greater evil. Perhaps the players are sent to destroy a magic jewel which grants the enemy mages their power. When they do, it opens a portal to hell!

The Unifying Power of Evil

After the "War to End All Wars," Germany was in desperate straits. It had been thoroughly crushed by the first world war. Its economy was in ruins, and national pride was at an all-time low. As various factions fought for control of the battered country, Germany needed a savior. And that is what they got in Adolf Hitler. He united the people of Germany, and rallied them to war with a dream of world conquest and Arian supremacy. In hindsight, the lesson here is that, when a group of people are divided and desperate, they will sometimes allow evil men to rule them if the evil men can bring stability.

Roleplaying Applications

- A certain race -- be they orcs, vampires, demons, dragons, aliens, or what have you -- attempted to conquer the world but were defeated. However, their numbers are still great. A charismatic leader comes along and unites them, and the struggle is renewed. (In the years since WWII this plot has become a sci-fi/fantasy staple.)

- Brutal civil war and racial hatred has ripped a nation apart, and the battered people are looking for something to bring them out of the chaos and unite them once more. Adventurers may be needed seek famous relics from the glory days of the past which may help restore national pride and serve as a symbol of hope.
- If things get bad enough, the heroes may be forced to take up arms and unite a divided nation by force before the evil demagogue wins over the hearts of the people.

The Problem Of Appeasement

Hitler was allowed to violate the terms of the Treaty of the Versailles and rearm Germany because the world powers did not wish to risk another world war. They chose to stand idle when Hitler forcibly annexed Austria and Czechoslovakia. Had the League Of Nations acted sooner, a second World War may have been prevented.

Roleplaying Applications

- The heroes know that an extremely influential noble in their world is evil, but the power players of the game world chose to overlook his foul deeds. Many of them benefit from his existence, and would be greatly angered should anything happen to him. The PCs must decide if they are willing to risk everything to destroy the villain.
- The PCs must weigh the consequences of defeating a villain against the costs to themselves and the world.

The Horror Of The Concentration Camps

Adolf Hitler needed a scapegoat for the problems of Germany, and he chose the Jewish people. The Jews were moved to concentration camps, then killed. In the USA, hostility toward the Japanese reached an all time high when thousands of Asians were placed in internment camps for the duration of the war. Concentration camps hold some of the most chilling memories of World War Two.

Roleplaying Applications

- If the players hear that the local king is rounding up all the citizens of a certain race, they will instantly be suspicious. The king has become evil, and is using the members of the race for hideous experiments. Perhaps one of the heroes is a member of the race that is being gathered, and must avoid the king's troops.
- Alternatively, perhaps the king has good reasons for rounding up the members of a certain race. This plays against players' natural reactions to concentration camps, and makes an excellent twist to a scenario. Perhaps there is a plague ripping through the pixie community, and only one wizard (loyal to the king) capable of curing it. The king has rounded up all the pixies in order to cure them. Will the PCs distaste and distrust of such institutions be swayed? Might they try to keep an eye on the proceedings?
- Another twist on this concept is to have the king originally round up a certain race because of Good or at least Neutral reasons, but as time goes on the camps become institutions of evil. The pixies are originally gathered together so that they can be healed, but once the healing is completed the king begins getting missives from people who think their towns are better off without pixies. So the king orders that the pixies stay in the camps. Eventually, he decides the cost of maintaining the camps is too great, and orders the deaths of the pixies. Can the heroes save this peaceful race from extinction?
- When the PCs are placed in a concentration camp, they must find a way to liberate themselves. While there, they meet many of the other innocents interred there. Should they merely save their own skins, or try to rescue those around them as well?

The events of the past provide many themes that can enhance a roleplaying campaign. World War II may be over, but echoes of that conflict still resonate in our society today.

Ajani the Soul-Thief

for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Bevan Thomas

Raised by a plains-dwelling tribe, even at a young age Ajani demonstrated an affinity for the spirit world. When Ajani came of age, he was apprenticed to the local shaman. As part of his initiation, Ajani was transported to the Underworld to gain an understanding of the passage of the soul. Ajani's encounter with this gloomy, mist-shrouded land shook him to his core, and at that moment Ajani decided that he would never find himself trapped there. He would never die.

Though for the next few years Ajani seemed to serve his master well, he secretly studied forbidden sorcery, learning how to bend demons to his will. When his master confronted Ajani on his use of the dark art, Ajani killed him and fled. With his dying breaths, the old shaman cursed Ajani, saying that "you will feel your life slowly waste away within you, until your body is nothing but a hollow shell and your soul is sent screaming into darkness." As Ajani felt the curse wash over him, other members of the tribe saw him standing over the body of the shaman, and realized the horrible act that Ajani had committed. They drove Ajani out, forcing him into the wilderness.

For the next few weeks, Ajani did his best to survive on his own, too filled with fear and guilt to attempt to reenter his tribe. In horror, Ajani experienced the extent of the curse as he felt his life slowly bleeding from him. No spell or herb that he knew could heal him, and so in desperation he summoned a powerful demon and struck a deal. The demon taught Ajani a spell that would allow him to replenish his lost life-force by consuming the souls of others, and in return he released the demon and six of the demon's brothers against his former tribe, allowing the demons to feast upon the souls there. Horrified at what he had done, Ajani fled and wandered the wild, racked with grief.

Eventually he arrived at a village belonging to another tribe, and was already starting to again feel the effects of the shaman's curse. In desperation, Ajani murdered a woman and then drank her essence, escaping again before the crime could be discovered. However, whenever he started to feel the hunger again, he struck.

Over the years, this cycle continued, and it has taken its toll on Ajani. He has become emaciated and worn, with a face that appears stretched. However, more drastically has been the cycle's affect on his mind. Ajani has become isolated from all those around him. He no longer agonizes over the lives he steals, but instead feeds off of them with no more concern than any predator has for its prey.

Ajani is not particularly brave, and prefer to strike from the shadows, using blowpipe darts tipped with a paralytic drug in order to stun his victims so that he may get close enough to drain their essence.

Ajani in the Campaign

Most of the elements of his background are generic, and should be modified as appropriate for the campaign. Relevant specialties would probably be replaced with terms that directly relate to the campaign world's tribal cultures, such as changing Religious Rituals (shamanism) to Religious Rituals (Wolf Clan rites) or replacing Survival (plains) with another Survival specialty if the tribe that the GM wishes Ajani to come from makes its home in another environment (such as the frozen tundra or a dense jungle).

The most likely role for Ajani in the campaign is that of an adversary. Most player characters would have little sympathy for Ajani goals and would seek to end the shaman's soul-feasting. Ajani is a particularly deadly adversary due to the subtlety of his magic. His enemies often do not recognize that supernatural forces are being brought against them until Ajani finally devours their life-essence. The trail of soul-drained bodies that he leaves behind him could attract the attention of PCs or people that wish to employ them, and Ajani choosing the associate of a player character for his next victim could give additional emotional intensity to a battle with the Soul-Thief.

Because of Ajani's solitary nature, he has no allies. However, he is willing to scavenge off of the works of others, using wars, purges, and other such events as smoke-screens for his own actions. Some people believed to have died in battle were actually spirited away from the conflict by Ajani and then had their souls extracted for his sustenance.

Ajani   *300 points*

Attributes: **ST** 8 [-20]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 14 [60]; **HT** 12 [20]
Will 16 [10]; Per 14 [0]; HP 8 [0]; FP 14 [6]
Base Speed: 5.5 [0] Basic Move: 5 [0]
Basic Damage: Thrust 1d-3, Swing 1d-2

Advantages: Channeling [10], Medium [10], Ritual Magery 1 [15], Oracle [15], Spirit Empathy [10] Perk: Autotrance [1]

Disadvantages: Callous [-5], Dependency (human soul-essence, occasional, illegal, weekly, aging +30%)[-65], Illiteracy [-3], Loner [-5], Obsession (living forever) [-10], Skinny [-5], Unattractive [-4]

Languages: Native [0], three others at accented [12]

Skills: Blowpipe-10 [4], Bow-10 [2], Dreaming-14 [1], Esoteric Medicine-13 (tribal healing) [2], Fast-Talk-13 [1], Herb Lore-13 [2], Hidden Lore (spirit lore)-15 [4], Intimidation-15 [1], Knife-11 [2], Meditation-16 [4], Naturalist-14 [2], Occultism-15 [4], Poisons-13 [2], Religious Ritual-13 (shamanism) [2], Ritual Magic-16 (malefic shamanism) [16], Staff-11 [4], Stealth-13 [8], Survival-14 (plains) [2], Symbol Drawing-15 (malefic shamanism) [8]

Paths: Path of Body Control-13 [6], Path of the Gate-16 [16], Path of Healing-16 [16], Path of Knowledge-16 [16], Path of Necromancy-16 [16]

Rituals: Analyze Magic-15 [1], Aura-16 [1], Banish-16 [10], Bottle the Soul-19 [5], Deathtouch-15 [10], Death Vision-18 [2], Detect Magic-17 [1], Great Healing-14 [4], Identify Spell-16 [1], Lend Energy-16 [1], Lend Vitality-16 [1], Major Healing-15 [2], Minor Healing-15 [1], Pain-14 [2], Paralyze Limb-11 [3], Plane Shift (Home Plane)-13 [8], Plane Shift (Underworld)-13 [8], Recover Energy-20 [5], Rooted Feet-11 [1], Seeker-15 [3], Sense Spirit-20 [5], Spasm-15 [2], Summon Demon-15 [9], Summon Spirit-19 [3], Trace-15 [4], Wither Limb-10 [4]

Bottle the Soul

This spell lets the caster trap the target's soul so that it can later be used to invigorate the caster.

The spell can only be cast on someone who is already dying, and during the spell, the target's dying breath must be trapped within a bottle. If the bottle's stopper is ever removed, then the essence escapes, and the spell is canceled; furthermore, the essence will automatically escape after 72 hours.

In order to complete the spell, the caster must drink the soul that is trapped in the bottle. Drinking the essence will make the caster one year younger, and also alleviate the caster from the need to make any aging rolls for one year. However, it also means that the target has been completely annihilated, and so cannot be resurrected, have his spirit summoned, or in any way be interacted with from beyond.

College: Necromancy.
Duration: See above.
Cost: 4
Time to cast: 1 minute.
Prerequisites: Magery 2, Lend Vitality, and Summon Spirit

Pyramid Review

Ticket to Ride: Märklin Edition

Published by [Days of Wonder](#)

Designed by Alan R. Moon

Boxed, full-color, two to five players; map board, 240 train cars in five colors, 15 passengers (three per player), five scoring markers, 118 train cards, 46 destination tickets, 74 merchandise tokens, & rule booklet; $39.95

Ticket to Ride: Märklin Edition is the third in Days of Wonder's popular and award-winning series of railroad building games. Märklin, for those not in the know, is one of the biggest names in the model train hobby (in fact, going first depends on being the owner of the most Märklin cars), and they lend images from some of their products to cards in the game.

The object of the game remains to score the highest at the end of the game.

As in previous editions, players take turns collecting train cards, building sections of rail, and selecting destinations. To connect a pair of cities, you have to play as many cards of like color as there are sections of track between the two locations. Locomotives are wild cards that can be substituted for the colored "cars." You get points for each segment of train you complete and for each ticket you finish (tickets show two cities you have to unite with your rail lines).

Unlike those others, there's no reward here for achieving the longest continuous stretch of track; instead, there's a bonus for finishing the most tickets. You're now building on a map of Germany from one nearly unpronounceable burg to the next, with a few of the lines leading into nearby countries (some of which do figure into the destination tickets). Locomotive cards come in a couple of versions: the old wild cards, and the new "4+" variety. The latter are still wild, but are only useable if you're building a track of four or more segments (though there are many more of those on this map -- it tends to be a higher-scoring game).

The biggest single change, however, is passengers. Unlike a lot of railroading games, the ***Ticket To Ride*** series was all about laying down track and that was about it; there was no sense that there was travel or commerce. But with ***Ticket to Ride: Märklin Edition*** you have both. When you fill in a section with your train cars, you may place one of your three passengers on one of the two connected cities. As your action in a future turn, you may then have the traveler move along your lines to collect tokens from little stacks at certain cities. The larger the town, the more trading there is. The setup is the same each game, with Berlin offering the highest-scoring opportunities. When the first counter is taken, the next one down is worth one less, and eventually the piles may become exhausted. Send a passenger on his trip too early and you won't have the lines to visit enough cities. Wait too long, and someone else beats you to the goods. Once he's done with his run, the passenger is removed from play.

Accordingly, there's a new card type one may draw from the train deck, with a picture of a passenger on it. If you have these, you may play them as your traveler moves about the board. Each one allows you to use a section of someone else's track for your itinerary, and that can be critical to plugging holes in your almost-complete rail line.

Those Märklin pictures are a nice graphical addition to the game. There are some positively spiffy locomotives, and these complement the game's overall post-modern look well. The merchandise tokens are small, and picking them up makes you feel you're all thumbs (especially since, when you try to gather them, you're striving to avoid accidentally pushing already-placed train cars out of the way to get to them), but the size is the only shortcoming among the pieces. One really nice feature is that someone thought to design the scoring counters to stack in case two or more players

have to share the same value on the point track along the board's edge.

Perhaps there was pressure to create a version using travel, but if this edition is pandering, it's pandering of the best sort. European game designers seem to have a knack for releasing the same game with just enough of the right tweaks to make it a different game or to change the strategy one uses. The massive rail systems of old may not serve you as well as a staccato sprinkling of smaller segments that account for a somewhat scattered selection of destination start and stop points. Whether it's having to familiarize yourself with the ins and outs of a whole new map or learning to build rail lines in a way that offers you the best merchandise routes, *Ticket to Ride: Märklin Edition* throws the switch on the tracks once more, keeping what works and adding what keeps the franchise a success.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Blue Rose: The Roleplaying Game of Romantic Fantasy

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Designed by Jeremy Crawford, Dawn Elliot, Steve Kenson, & John Snead

Cover by Stephanie Pui-Min Law

Illustrated by Elaine "Lilith" Bettocci, Elizabeth Danforth, Eliza Gauger, Jonathan Kirtz, Stephanie Pui-Min Law, Leo Lingas, Jennifer Meyer, & Lisa Wood

Cartography by Phillip Lienau

224-page b&w softcover; $29.95

Blue Rose marks the *d20 System's* entry of the into a genre of kinder, gentler, even more feminine RPGs currently occupied by *[Hearts, Swords, Flowers](#)* and *Cat the RPG.* Inspired by the novels of Diane Duane, Mercedes Lackey, and Robin McKinley, this is the roleplaying game of romantic fantasy, a sub-genre that places the emphasis upon relationships, entanglements, love, and romance, rather than monster slaying, epic quests, or saving the world from some great evil. Except that it is not a *d20 System* RPG.

Taking its cue from the publisher's highly acclaimed *[Mutants & Masterminds](#)* the designers of *Blue Rose* go several steps further in taking a filleting knife to the meat of the *d20 System.* The result is that this OGL title is powered by the new *True20* system, which retains the *d20 System's* salient features -- such as the d20 roll plus modifiers mechanic, and the feats -- but simplifies their use and application. One result has been that the *True20* system has been spun off and released as a stand-alone product, *True20 Adventure Roleplaying.*

The setting for *Blue Rose* is Aldea, a young world with barely 1,500 years of recorded history. Prior to this in the Mythic Age, the Gods of Light created the world as an exercise in joy, before using it as a vessel to protect souls from Shadow's corruptive influence. Indeed the cycle of life and death was introduced together with reincarnation to ensure the continued existence of souls. More specifically, *Blue Rose* focuses on Aldis, the Kingdom Of The Blue Rose, a beacon of understanding, tolerance, and Light following the Dark Age of the Sorcerer Kings. Ruled wisely by the young Queen Jaellin, selected like her forebears for her fine qualities by the Golden Hart (which can also deselect the Monarch, and has), she is aided by her Nobles (also chosen from any walk of life for their alignment to Light) and several knightly orders. These include the Sovereign's Finest, essentially trouble-shooters, that protect the kingdom from the monsters and dark magic left over from the Shadow Wars against the Sorcerer Kings, the Lich Kingdom of the Kern (last bastion of the Sorcerer Kings), and the fanatical Theocracy of Jerzon. Allied with Aldis are the Rhydan, which are intelligent animals that often become the companions to -- and even bond with -- humans. The Rhydan along with several other races are accepted in Aldis as long as they profess alignment to Light, but there are prejudices against both them and same-sex relationships in neighboring nations.

Blue Rose's paring down begins with the characteristics. Replacing the usual 3 to 18 scale of the six attributes is a scale of -5 to +5, players starting with six points to buy positive levels. In effect, players are buying the *d20 System's* characteristic bonuses, which is then applied to a d20 roll as normal.

Instead of race, a character selects a Background, which also includes various types of Rhydan -- Rhycats, Rhy-horses, and Rhy-wolves. No Rhydan is capable of speech, instead communicating through mind touch, and since they lack opposable thumbs, fine manipulation and weapon use is impossible. The stripping down continues with the concept of character classes; *Blue Rose* has just the three which it calls Roles. The Adept is a mixture of the Scholar and the Mystic, skilled in the arcane arts; the Expert is skilled in various areas; and the Warrior is a combat specialist. A Role provides skills and feats, suggesting favoured feats, and also how both can be used to model different character types, such as Healers, Bards, Nobles, Thieves, Knights, and Rangers. Skills themselves are fewer in number and are acquired on a yes/no basis, skill Rank determined by a character's level rather than being purchased as in the *d20 System.* As a character gains levels, he gains more feats, and to reflect both this and *Blue Rose's* magic system there are lots of feats listed. Interestingly, *and* radically, there is no experience point system, and instead the GM awards levels at an appropriate juncture in a campaign.

Alignment is also simplified to three: Light, Shadow, and Twilight. In addition a character has a Calling (a goal or motivation) plus a dual Nature comprised of Light and Shadow side. Both are modelled upon Tarot cards, calling upon the Major Arcana, like Death for "Creating change," or The Sun for "Championing the everyday"; and the Minor Arcana for a character's nature. Thus the Knight of Swords has Bold as its Light Nature and Boastful as its Shadow Nature. A list is given for all three. Roleplaying all three is also a method of regaining Conviction, *Blue Rose's* equivalent of action or luck points. A character begins with a few Conviction points, his maximum increasing every few levels. Conviction is expended to re-roll a die, temporarily gain an unowned feat, gain a dodge bonus or extra action, recover quicker from damage, or to escape death.

If *Blue Rose* shows the influence of *Mutants & Masterminds* anywhere, it is in its combat system, particularly with regard to damage. Instead of rolling for it, damage is a combination of a character's Strength score plus weapon damage rating. The target makes a Toughness saving throw directly against this value, the result determining a character's damage status rather than how many hit points he has lost. This can be Dazed or Staggered, Wounded or Disabled, the resulting damage condition better modelling both lethal and non-lethal damage than in the *d20 System.* For minions (or Mooks) damage is further simplified, each having only three states: normal, unconscious, or dead. Further a character can choose to inflict a lesser status upon a minion, say making them unconscious rather than killing them, thus reflecting a character's greater skill.

Blue Rose's magic is also radically different, with all characters allowed access to it, but the Adept Role possessing greater ranks. It is divided into roughly six types -- animism, healing, meditative, psychic, shaping, and visionary. Once a character has the basic talent for a type, he can select further feat-like Arcana for that type. Mechanically, they work much like skills and nor are they single use abilities. Many are capable of doing several things, and they can be used as often as a player likes, but this is offset by a fatigue cost offset for many Arcana.

Of course, magic has its dark side, Sorcery being known as the Shadow Art. It taps into the mind's dark recesses, exposing the caster to Corruption. This can also be acquired by carrying out an act of the character's Shadow Nature in a corrupt place, although Sorcery is an easier path to Corruption. Corruption's effect is to penalize a character's Constitution and Wisdom *and* loosen control of his Shadow Nature. It can be staved off with Conviction, but embracing Corruption can make a character very powerful. Fortunately redemption is possible, but it takes considerable effort.

Playing *Blue Rose* places its emphasis on social interaction and social connections, plus romantic entanglements and intrigues. The advice on this is sound enough, though no doubt could be developed further -- *Hearts, Swords, Flowers* could be of help here. The GM is also given a bestiary with its entries given in *True20* format, and a starting scenario. "The Curse of Harmony" is short, but does touch upon *Blue Rose's* various themes -- tolerance, religious differences, corruption, and giving aid, thus serving as a decent model for the GM. Finally an appendix gives guidelines for adapting other *d20 System* material.

Physically, *Blue Rose* is up to Green Ronin's usual standards with illustrations to match the genre. The writing is solid, but the book suffers from a lack of explanation in places. More examples would have helped, such as for character generation. Another problem for some might be the setting. Aldea is perhaps too saccharine, too black and white, but then it is trying to emulate a particular genre.

And in hewing to the romantic fantasy genre, **Blue Rose** could be argued as being Shoujo Manga's occidental counterpart. It definitely gives you everything necessary to play, and once past the lack of explanation, the new rules are light and simple, with an excellently designed magic system that allows a PC an easy-to-use wide choice. Indeed the magic system is so good that rename the Arcana Force Powers, rename Conviction the Force, plug in spaceships and lightsabers; and the mechanics of **Blue Rose** would be perfect for a *Star Wars* game.

While the setting for **Blue Rose** might not be everyone's cup of tea -- much like the genre it emulates -- this is not to say that it is not well done. That it certainly is, for **Blue Rose** provides the GM with everything necessary to play. Ultimately though, it is the mechanics that support the setting that really shine here, for **Blue Rose** is an elegant evolution of the **d20 System.**

--Matthew Pook

Things I Hate As A GM (Player Edition)

Okay; for the past month I've been going over the truth-table diagram, looking at the intersection of "love/hate" with "GM/Player." However, I realized early on that I was only addressing things from the point of view of things I loved or hated from manufacturers. So, never one to let a good, long-running series of columns leave the station without trying to milk that puppy 'til the cows come home, I rammed a few more metaphors together and decided to look at things I love and hate as a GM/Player, looking at GMs/Players.

Make sense?

Yeah, me neither. Suffice it to say, today we're looking at things I hate as a GM in my players.

Ready? Good!

* * *

PCs who seem to own One Of Everything. I've never been a huge fan of micromanaging equipment; I don't much care for the classic ***Dungeons & Dragons***-esque minutia of itemizing every copper piece, scrap of lint, and iota of turkey jerkey. For the most part, I usually prefer to trust players and go with the flow when they claim to possess certain common objects that I've seen most people carry: pen knives, a paper clip or two, a belt, and so on. Unfortunately, some players seem to have an unending supply of previously unknown useful items, despite no previous justification or in-character inclination toward packratitude.

Me (as GM): Okay; you approach the warehouse, and you realize it's really dark.
Player: I pull out a flashlight.
Me: You have a flashlight?
Player: Yeah; one of those police-issue ones that can double as a club.
Me: Uhhh... okay, fine. Anyway, you approach the door and discover it's locked.
Player: I pull out some lockpicks.
Me: Lockpicks?! You don't have any skill that would be useful with them . . .
Player: No, but I thought they might be useful.
Me: Right. Well, unfortunately, there's nothing to pick. It's a magnetic lock.
Player: Huh. Good thing I brought an oxyacetylene torch!
Me: . . . Luckily I brought one, too. Hand me your character sheet.

Unfortunately, it's a thorny issue, since I don't like to discourage players from being creative, and the obvious alternative some players take is to spend countless hours in "buying sprees" before an adventure. But, ultimately, my desire is for players to solve problems with their characters, not with a Bat-Utility-Belt approach that allows them to always have that 50-foot rope, power drill, and World Almanac at ready reach.

Players whose characters pry up everything that isn't nailed down. While the idea of collecting "loot" is a time-honored tradition in many games (yes, ***Dungeons & Dragons,*** I'm fixing my steely gaze on you), in many -- indeed, I argue *most* -- genres, it isn't really appropriate. After all, in my games I'm usually most interested in emulating other genres: spy movies, space opera television shows, comic books, and the like. And in most of those genres, you don't see Bond pulling out a device he looted in the last movie, or Kirk falling back on a techno-babble solution from a few episodes ago. Unfortunately, a lot of players *like* having their characters strip the fallen bodies of their foes, and they too often expect to be able to whip out those devices at a later time. And coming up with a new reason to take away their toys every single adventure weighs on my soul.

For years I favored a solution akin to ***Champions/Hero System,*** which requires players to pay character points for anything they keep. In this regard, there's no real difference between holding onto Dr. Destructablo's 12D6 Laser Blastarino and building your own. However, I think this is a bit overzealous; for example, one of the pivotal moments in Alan Moore's ***Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?*** revolves around him remebering and utilizing a

previous device. Nowadays I'm more inclined to allow players access to previous looted stuff, but force them to spend "fate points" or whatever game-altering mechanic the system uses. But that doesn't change the fact that, ideally, such uses would be few and far between; much like point #1, above, I prever the players to solve problems with their characters.

Loner PCs. Any player who consistantly forces me to take them aside so they can have their own private adventures -- bringing the rest of the group's gaming to a screeching halt -- earn a bit of inner scowling.

(Curiously, at least twice I've had players *lie* to me about the extent that their characters would be loners; I was reassured that, although their concepts included more of the loner-esque quality, they would primarily remain with the group. Usually it was about two minutes into the first adventure before said PCs wandered off.)

* * *

Anyway, that's it for this week. I wouldn't be so crass as to include a link to the beginning of my massive eBay sell-off, but instead would encourage you all to share your own thoughts on your peeves via e-mail or on the discussion boards. Next week we'll continue the non-stop love or hate, depending on our mood.

--Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

Designer's Notes: GURPS Space, Fourth Edition

Wild Life: A Worked Campaign Example

by James L. Cambias

"Wild Life" was one of three "worked example" appendices cut out of the first draft of *GURPS Space Fourth Edition* for reasons of length. The goal was to create a near-future, relatively hard-SF setting in which humans (and thus the PCs) were genuinely the underdogs. Potential themes to explore include rebellion, the ethics of collaboration and resistance, and understanding the Other.

The tone would most likely be Thriller or Action-Adventure, though it could shade into Space Opera. Genetic and psychological manipulation of humans by aliens could inject a note of horror.

The scale would start fairly small, but as the PCs and the rebellion they support gain in power, they can have more of an effect on the game world. Similarly the physical scope would initially be a single town or province, but could ultimately become interstellar.

I tried to keep the science very hard, with only one piece of "rubber science" -- the Shahar faster-than-light drive. I assumed a Hard-SF TL9, with superscience faster-than-light drives and TL10 alien biotechnology. Within those limits, it can support adventure styles ranging from harshly realistic to blatantly cinematic.

Since the days of Johannes Kepler, humans wondered if there was other intelligent life in the Universe. In 2053, they found out.

The conquest of the Solar System was fast and ruthless. The Shahar first strike destroyed satellites, missile silos and warships, and was followed quickly by landings in Earth's major cities. The ultimate Shahar weapon was the Pacification Plague -- a deadly human-specific virus. It killed 99 percent of those infected, guaranteeing that the vast majority of survivors were the humans willing to accept the Shahar antiviral drugs -- and thereby submit to their control. Half the human race died of the plague and the desperate military campaigns against the invaders, but the Shahar didn't mind; their plans for the Earth required some empty room for colonists and the new human species which they planned to create.

That was 50 years ago. The initial war of conquest ended, a series of doomed revolts were put down, and now it seems humanity has accepted its role in the Shahar Family of Species.

The Shahar

Earth's new masters are an advanced species of carnivores, who use genetic manipulation to mold conquered species into ideal servants, and to shape themselves into ideal masters.

Society

Shahar society is very stable, chiefly through the ceaseless efforts of social engineers to keep it that way. Young Shahar are constantly tested for aptitude in various fields -- military, administration, science, etc. -- and based on those

tests are trained and indoctrinated for placement in one of true numerous professional castes.

Membership in a caste guarantees certain privileges and responsibilities; in human terms it's like belonging to a combination of professional association, labor union, social class, and political party. Within its area of expertise, a caste is supreme, and all important decisions on issues affecting that area must include a caste leader in the process. Caste membership is not hereditary, but there is strong pressure to marry within one's caste. It is an explicit goal of the Shahar social engineers to make all castes genetically optimal for their jobs.

The three most important castes are the Social Engineers, the Military Officers, and the Administrators. The most respected and high-status members of those castes make up the majority of the Objective Council, which determines the long-term goals and strategies of Shahar society. The Objective Council's exact membership changes depending on what is going on. When military affairs are paramount, there are more Officer members. In peacetime, the balance shifts and more members from castes in trade, industry, and the sciences join.

Ancestry

The Shahar homeworld, Ahur, is slightly smaller than Earth, and considerably drier. Less than half its surface is covered by water, and continental drift has created a landscape with no large ocean basins. The Shahar evolved from bipedal pack hunters and scavengers in the vast dry plains of Ahur. Their small forelimbs and headlimbs originally functioned as claws for killing prey, but evolved to more general-purpose manipulators. According to Shahar texts (which may or may not be "edited" for humans), the Shahar path to intelligence began with increasingly complex communication and social behavior in hunting packs, progressed to herding of game animals and the use of language, and only then to the creation of tools.

The Planet Ahur

World Type: Standard (Garden)
Size Factor: 0.73
Blackbody Temperature: 295 K
Density: 1.1
Diameter: 0.84 Earth diameters (6,657 miles)
Mass: 0.65 Earth masses
Gravity: 0.92 G
Atmosphere: Standard (low oxygen); pressure 0.83 bars, oxygen content 12%
Hydrography: 50% ocean coverage
Average Temperature: 304° K (88° F)
Climate: Warm
Resource Modifier: 0 (average)
Affinity Rating: 8 (for Shahar)
Population: 4 billion
TL: Standard TL10 (advanced in biology and memetics)
Society: World Government, Meritocratic Caste system
Control Rating: 4
Per-Capita Income: $72,000 (Average TL10 wealth)
Economic Volume: $288 trillion
Manpower: 24,000
Facilities: 172,800
Military: 12 Armies, 4 Elite Armies (the Expeditionary Force), 6 Special Army (Aerospace Forces), 2 Special Elite Army (Expeditionary Assault Force), 12 Reserve Armies, 12 Militia Corps.
Fleet: 2 Major Fleets, 2 Minor Fleets, 1 Cruiser Squadron
Facilities: Very Large Spaceport in orbit (plus numerous Frontier spaceports at airfields

on the surface), 2 Large Naval Bases in orbit, 2 Average Naval Bases on surface, 1 Small Naval Base (exploration command, in orbit), 2 Large Shipyards in orbit, 2 orbital industrial habitats, Advanced space elevator, 40 spaceplane shuttles, 10 launch lasers. **Notes:** Ahur is a dry planet, with broad plains and rocky deserts interrupted by old mountain chains and a few shallow seas. There are no polar caps, and snow is rare even at high latitudes. It has no moons, and rotates with a period of 18 hours.

History

Roughly 100,000 years ago, overgrazing set off a catastrophic climate shift on Ahur, reducing large regions to desert. The Shahar population went into a nosedive; there may have been only a few hundred Shahar alive at the height of the crisis. The desert crisis also served as a powerful Darwinian culling of the species: the Shahar who survived understood the importance of cooperation, sound management of their lands, and long-range thinking. They were also, on average, smarter and tougher than their ancestors.

As the planet recovered, the Shahar spread across its surface once more, but they no longer lived in feuding tribes. They established a government which united the various clans and bands, resolving disputes and allocating land. At first it was a simple gathering of tribal elders, but later developed into a kind of federation. Though various tribes at times renounced it or rebelled against it, and beyond the borders groups of barbarians fought and raided, the central government (known as the Enershen, or "Family of Families") alway controlled the bulk of the planet's population.

The 20,000-year history of the Enershen is the history of the Shahar civilization, even to the present day. In that long time it has changed structure dozens of times. Since approximately 3000 BC, the government has been technocratic: plans and policies are devised and implemented by experts, selected and trained for government early in life.

Designer's Note

In creating the Shahar, I wanted alien overlords who had a good reason for trying to conquer the Galaxy. The Shahar are doing it because they think it's the right thing to do -- and who knows? They might be right. They're powerful, but they have some Achilles' Heels the human rebels can exploit. The biggest is the other subject species, who might well join an uprising.

Shahar science followed a different path than Terran. The Shahar first developed a good understanding of biology, especially ecology and genetics. That in turn led them to chemistry and thermodynamics during the first millennium BC. Electricity and magnetism came relatively late in Shahar scientific history. They had electric power by AD 1200, and an understanding of electromagnetic waves by 1400.

The first Shahar space flight was in AD 1600. A two-stage vehicle put an unmanned satellite in orbit in 1615. Exploration of their star system proceeded slowly and methodically during the 17th and 18th centuries. Computer science developed during the same era, and made the entire administration of the Enershen dramatically more efficient. As with most of their technologies, the Shahar preferred to concentrate on large, centrally-administered systems, so today they have powerful mainframe computers but no personal devices. Individuals have personal terminals instead, linked to the central systems.

One aspect of Shahar science which humans have found amusing is its tendency to go off on long, well-funded wild-goose chases. Metallurgy led to a long digression into what humans might call alchemy, while the first discoveries in quantum physics led to pointless investigations of consciousness and "psychic" phenomena. On the other hand, a similarly bogus-seeming project in 1820 to penetrate "higher dimensions" paid off handsomely with the development of the Tube Drive. Suddenly the Universe was open to the Shahar.

The first alien civilization encountered by the Shahar were the Tarcaseru, in 1853. Since at the time the Tarcaseru were still only experimenting with working iron tools, there was no real resistance to the Shahar, and the Shahar had established a colonial government before even formulating plans on what to do.

The Family of Species

The Shahar have organized themselves and six other species into a single polity, known as the Enershakun, or Family of Species. Their goal is to make all intelligent life into a single, interdependent society. To accomplish this, the Shahar have embarked on a policy of genetic engineering, selective breeding, and social manipulation of their subject species. Each is being specialized for a particular role. The Shahar, naturally, have chosen to develop their own abilities at government, manipulation, and leadership. They are be the natural-born rulers of the Family.

Gustrogins are physically the largest of the Family, and consequently the Shahar have made them workers and soldiers. The Shahar engineers have attempted to make them docile, obedient, and patient, and are working on improving their stamina and notoriously poor vision.

The Tarcaseru had a highly complex society of their own and showed a natural talent for communication and organization. The Shahar have emphasized these traits in them, turning them into a whole species of middle managers and bureaucrats. Most of the day-to-day administration of the Family of Species is conducted by Tarcaseru, and they are the most thoroughly integrated into the new society.

The Qasuti are the only completely aquatic species in the Family, and the Shahar rely on them for work and miliary operations in underwater environments. Because they live where few Shahar wish to visit, the Qasuti have retained a bit more autonomy, and have undergone little biological modification.

The Ascended are seen only infrequently on Earth, but are often encountered in orbit and in deep space. The conquest of the Ascended was an exceedingly bloody affair, and the Shahar took the unusual step of implanting symbiotic drug-producing organisms in the bodies of all Ascended who leave their home world. The drug symbiotes produce a constant supply of hormones which make the Ascended calm, peaceful, and obedient.

Finally, there are the newest members of the Family: humans. The Shahar were impressed by humans' dextrous hands, superb pattern-recognition, and capacity for sustained effort. They have decided to make humans into a new technical caste within the Family, and to that end have been developing the new human race to be less competitive, more attentive, and not as constantly sexual.

The Shahar honestly believe they are doing good. By conquering humanity and incorporating Homo sapiens into the Family of Species they are bringing peace and stability to Earth, preventing interstellar conflict, and helping to bring about the final unification of all intelligent life.

The Occupation Government

The Shahar rule Earth and the Solar System through an arrangement which is designed to encourage human loyalty to the Family of Species rather than local governments or institutions. They replaced most of the human political divisions with a new system of administrative provinces, each with a few million inhabitants.

Each province is controlled by a Provincial Administrator. The Administrators are humans or Tarcaseru in areas deemed sufficiently loyal, but in unreliable zones they are always Shahar. The Administrator commands a police force of 1,000 to 5,000 human officers; military forces are not under the Administrator's control.

The provinces in turn are grouped into large regions of about 100 million people. The 49 regions of Earth each have a Shahar Tharshen (literally "leader of families"), who controls both the provincial administrators and the regional military forces. Tharshens have wide authority in governing their regions.

Designer's Note

The discussion of the Occupation regime has been cut down somewhat. To make the Shahar conquest more plausible I originally listed some "quisling states" who supported the invaders. In retrospect I think that tied the setting too much to present-day geopolitics. How things will line up in 2053 is impossible to predict.

Off Earth, the outposts in Earth orbit and on the Moon are organized as a
single Region with only two million people, and there is another Region incorporating Mars and the outer Solar
System, which has a total of one million inhabitants.

All 51 Regions are under the ultimate authority of the Tharshathar (literally, "leader of leaders"), who is the ruler of
the Solar System and answers to the Social Engineers on Ahur.

Technology

The Shahar and the Enershakun in general are a mature TL9. Earth and the human outposts in the Solar System are a
mix of old TL8 and new TL9 equipment.

The Tube Drive

One "emergent superscience" which enabled the Shahar to conquer other civilizations is the Tube Drive, or
Hetharushath. It creates a temporary wormhole linking distant points in space. The Tube Drive gets around relativity
by rearranging the geometry of spacetime. Tube Drives are incredibly power-hungry, and only the biggest spacecraft
can carry one. The effect lasts several minutes, so a whole task force can use the wormhole created by a single large
ship.

Tube Drives only work in a relatively weak gravity field. They don't function within the orbit of Mars, and ships must
stay at least half a million miles away from Jupiter. The path between the ship and the target system must be clear of
solid matter or dense gas, and can't pass through any gravity fields. The maximum practical distance for a single
wormhole is currently half a light-year, so on an interstellar voyage ships must make multiple hops. From Earth to
Ahur is about 50 light-years, which takes more than 100 wormhole hops. Each jump requires at least 2 hours to
accomplish, sometimes more depending on the power plant available.

The nature of the Tube Drive affects Shahar strategy. The ships with drives are large and incredibly expensive. They
are seldom risked in direct combat. Instead, fighting is done by smaller craft, often using strap-on boosters.

Biotechnology

The Shahar are advanced in biotechnology, reaching TL10 in some areas. Their specialties are genetic engineering and
a thorough knowledge of alien biochemistries. This lets them create tailored diseases, modify their subject species, and
improve their own genome. Brain-manipulation equipment is not available; the Shahar still don't understand the
neuroanatomy of the various species they rule to be able to link up directly to them.

Military Forces

With the Solar System finally pacified, the Shahar have significantly reduced their military commitment in the region.
The ships and troops are needed elsewhere, and the threat from rebellious humans seems to have ended. Increasingly
the job of maintaining order falls to human military forces.

Space Forces

The Shahar space forces in the Solar System no longer contains any major offensive units. The great carriers and giant
weapon platforms have gone off elsewhere. There are a handful of light starships to defend the system from external
threats, some patrol craft to monitor inhabited worlds and protect commerce, and a small group of high-speed
transports to allow rapid response to disturbances.

Ground Troops

Today there are about half a million Shahar and Gustrogin troops on Earth. The 20 Shahar divisions are mostly armor, artillery, aircraft, and special warfare units. They are accompanied by an infantry force of 20 Gustrogin divisions. The Shahar and Gustrogins are grouped into 3 rapid-reaction armies of 10 divisions each. The armies are based in Colombia, Egypt, and Vietnam, with a fourth hunting rebels in the Alaska-Siberia region.

Integrated Human Forces

Human units under Shahar command are now by far the largest military force in the Solar System. There are currently 67 human divisions with Shahar officers. Half are armed and equipped with pre-invasion TL8 gear. The other half are TL9 light infantry, either motorized or airborne. Each Region has a garrison of one or two Integrated divisions.

In addition to the infantry divisions, humans also man the only naval force remaining on Earth, a fleet of aging TL8 cruisers, destroyers and gunboats left over from before the invasion. Most coastal Regions have a couple of small boats for patrol. The cruiser and destroyer squadrons are based in Japan, Capetown, and Panama. Though they are supposed to patrol the high seas, the Shahar really still don't trust the navy completely, and are content to let the ships rust in port. A division of Qasuti undersea troops supplement the navy, and are stationed at the same bases.

Species

Shahar

The Shahar are bipeds, with powerful hind legs for running and leaping. Their forelimbs are short and tipped with nasty-looking claws, and the four jointed limbs which serve in place of jaws have sharp tips (the feeding arms function as a single "hand" and so are bought as one Extra Arm). Their skin is smooth and colored a mottled gray-green. They see with a single eye, optimized for distance vision. Shahar have extremely complex voiceboxes, and can produce a vast array of sounds. Their language includes overtones and harmonics humans simply can't perceive.

Shahar home gravity is 0.92G, and their comfortable temperature range is 55 to 110 degrees Fahrenheit. On Earth they must wear filter masks to combat the high concentration of oxygen, but can breathe normally at altitudes of 10,000 feet or more. Point cost is 70 on Earth.

> **Designer's Note**
>
> I wanted the aliens to be hard-SF aliens rather than the space opera style "men in suits" type. The Shahar social and genetic engineering lets me get away with "typecasting" each species as warriors, bureaucrats, etc. Each species has some potential adventure hooks, either as potential allies or enemies of the rebel humans.

Attribute Modifiers: IQ+1 [20], DX+1 [20], HT+2 [20]
Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: Basic Speed +0.25 [5], Per+1 [5].
Advantages: Acute Hearing +2 [2], Discriminatory Hearing [15], Extra Arm (short, -50%), [5], Extended Lifespan 1 [2], Fearlessness +1 [2], Sensitive [5], Sharp Claws [5], Social Regard (alien overlord, +1) [5], Telescopic Vision 1 [5], Ultrahearing [5].
Disadvantages: Ham-Fisted [-5], No Peripheral Vision [-15], One Eye [-15], Short Arms [-10], Weakness (excess oxygen, 1d per 5 minutes, Fatigue only -50%, mitigated by filter mask -60%) [-6].
Quirks: Attentive, Chauvinistic [-2].

Gustrogins

The Gustrogins are large, powerful creatures, and the Shahar have done their best to turn them into docile workers. Using highly intelligent beings as so many draft animals is a waste of resources, but some human xenologists suspect the Shahar have deliberately made the Gustrogins occupy an inferior role to conceal the fact that they are far superior to their "masters."

Gustrogins have six limbs -- two arms, two legs, and a middle pair which can be used as either. When standing on four legs they are two meters tall, but can rear up to four meters on their hind legs. Their taste and smell are

exceptional, but other senses are poor. Ancestral Gustrogins had a harem system, but the Shahar have almost eliminated the males because they are too aggressive and hard to control. A small number of Gustrogin males live in special compounds on Gustrog under heavy Shahar guard, and all reproduction is by artificial insemination.

The Gustrogin homeworld (Gustrog) is slightly larger than Earth, with a gravity of 1.1 and an atmospheric pressure of 90%. It is a chilly planet, and the comfort range for Gustrogins is 20 to 75 degrees.

The template represents a female Gustrogin, as males are never encountered on Earth. Males add +4 ST, Bad Temper, Code of Honor, Lecherousness, and the Social Stigma "Valuable Property." Point cost for both sexes is 104 points.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+10 [100], HT+2 [20].
Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: Per-2 [-10].
Advantages: Acute Taste/Smell +6 [12], Discriminatory Smell [15], Extended Lifespan 1 [2], 2 Extra Arms (leg manipulators reduce move by half when used as arm, -2 manual DX, -60%) [8], 2 Extra Legs (can move at half on two legs, +20%) [12], Versatile [5].
Disadvantages: Bad Sight (mitigated with lenses, -60%) [-10], Ham-Fisted [-5], Increased Consumption (4 meals per day) [-10], Restricted Diet (citrus fruit and pickles) [-10], Weakness (capsicum peppers, 1d/minute if touched or eaten) [-20].
Quirks: Congenial, Dreamer, Nosy, Proud, Sensitive [-5].

Qasuti

The Qasuti are aquatic organisms, sometimes called "star crabs" by Terrans. They are radially symmetrical, with two body segments each bearing five limbs. The rear limbs are swimming fins, and propel the Qasuti at a rapid pace underwater. The forward limbs are for catching food, building shelters, and fighting. A Qasut's body is covered with an exoskeleton, and when the forward arms are folded back they are sleek and streamlined. Unusually, a Qasut's eyes are located on its arms, just behind the pincers. A Qasut's body is a squat blimp shape a meter long, but with fins and pincers extended, the length is closer to two meters.

Qasuti come from a world with no land at all, and their ocean is somewhat more acidic than the waters of Earth. Qasuti can't eat any Terrestrial foods at all, and must wear protective suits to prevent long-term health problems from swimming in alien seawater.

While the Shahar consider the Qasuti a completely integrated and loyal species, they may be deluding themselves. The Qasuti consider the Shahar to be their dupes, helping them spread across the Galaxy and doing all the "heavy lifting" of conquest while the Qasuti simply take over all the watery parts of the Shahar empire.

Humans and Qasuti often have difficulty communicating because of the extremely alien nature of their minds. They have great difficulty "quantizing" things or breaking them up into units, rather than considering things as a continuum. To humans, all their ideas seem maddeningly fuzzy, while to Qasuti, humans (and Shahar) are apparently incapable of perceiving subtleties. Because they are aquatic, home gravity isn't especially important, and their comfortable temperature range is 25 to 80 degrees. Point cost for Qasuti is 56 points on Earth, 76 on their home planet.

Attribute Modifiers: ST -1 [-10], DX -1 [-20], HT+2 [20]
Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: Basic Speed +0.75 [15].
Advantages: 360-degree vision [25], Acute Hearing +2 [2], Discriminatory Hearing (underwater only, -30%) [10], Doesn't Breathe (gills, underwater only) [0], Enhanced Move (water speed 12) [20], 3 Extra Arms [30], Sharp Claws [5].
Disadvantages: Aquatic [0], Callous [-5], Loner [-5], Restricted Diet (native food only) [-20], Xenophilia [-10].
Quirks: Staid [-1].

Tarcaseru

The Tarcaseru serve the Shahar as a caste of administrators, bureaucrats, and middle managers. They are by far the

most loyal of the Family of Species; if anything they are more devoted to the concept than the Shahar themselves.

Their homeworld is a large, low-density planet poor in metals and heavy elements, which retarded their technological development by several millennia. During that time they evolved a very complex, stable society controlled by a hereditary caste of scribes; when the Shahar arrived, the Tarcaseru scribes effectively inserted themselves into the alien society in much the same role.

Physically, Tarcaseru are small, lithe bipeds with two arms, a tail, and scaly skin which makes them look rather like dinosaurs. The head is the most distinctive feature: a round skull with three independently movable eyes and a set of complicated biting and grinding mouthparts.

They have a very low tolerance for any metals, and cannot eat most Terran plants except those which grow in water. Tarcaseru on Earth must take chelating tablets to avoid potentially dangerous metals in the water they drink (this is a long-term health effect, and so counts as a 0-point disadvantage). They are situational hermaphrodites: a well-fed Tarcaser is female, while a hungry one is male.

A Tarcaser stands about four feet tall, and is native to a gravity of 0.75G. Their comfortable temperature range is extremely warm, even more so than the Shahar: 70 to 125 degrees. On Earth they often go about in heavy furs. Point cost to be a Tarcaser is 36 points.

Attribute Modifiers: ST -1 [-10], DX +1 [20]
Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: Per +2 [10].
Advantages: 360-degree vision [25], Enhanced Tracking 2 [10].
Disadvantages: Bad Grip [-5], Restricted Diet (only water plants and fungi) [-10].
Quirks: Careful [-1], Distractible [-1], Imaginative [-1], Responsive [-1].
Features: Diet-controlled hermaphrodites.

The Ascended

The Ascended have a fascinating evolutionary history. On their homeworld, the shallow seas are dotted with thousands of islands covered by large groves of trees which thrive in the seawater and form canopies of jungle across the shallows. The ancestors of the Ascended were tentacled undersea predators who began to climb out of the water to hunt and scavenge in the forest canopy. Over millions of years they evolved stronger arms, excellent binocular vision, and the ability to live out of water for days at a time.

Ascended civilization is quite old. By the time the first Shahar expeditions reached their home system, the Ascended homeworld was surrounded by a belt of orbital habitats, home to tens of millions of individuals.

Their lack of political unity was what enabled the Shahar to conquer the Ascended. Ascended civilization never developed large states; their "natural" polity is apparently a small community of a few hundred, jealously territorial and fiercely independent. Ascended communities also function as economic enterprises, like a combination small town, collective farm, kibbutz, and corporation. The Shahar were able to snap them up one at a time, often allying with a coalition of rival communities to defeat a powerful one.

They are completely silent, communicating by color-changes and sign language. They have four powerful arms for climbing and walking, and four smaller tentacles for feeding. Unlike Terran cephalopods they cannot use jet propulsion underwater. Ascendeds have excellent vision, with four eyes -- two optimized for underwater darkness and two set close together for depth perception among the treetops. They are omnivores, tending more to meat-eating. Home gravity for the Ascended is 0.8G.

The template below depicts a modified Ascended with a Shahar drug implant for personality regulation. Without it their self-control numbers for Bad Temper, Loner, and Selfish are 9- instead of 15-. Since they are citizens of an interstellar state, there is no disadvantage for inhuman appearance. Cost with the implant is 53 points; cost without is 33 points.

Attribute Modifiers: ST-2 [-20], DX+1 [20].
Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: Basic Move -4 (walking only, -50%) [-10], Per+2 [10], FP-2 [-6].
Advantages: Amphibious [10], Brachiator [5], 2 Extra Arms (extra-flexible, +50%) [30], 4 Extra Arms (foot manipulators, -30%) [28], Flexibility [5], Gills [10], Immunity (all forms of space or motion sickness) [10], Mute (mitigated by talking hand computers, -60%) [-10], Nicitating Membrane 1 [1], Night Vision 5 [5], No Neck [5], Temperature Tolerance 1 (30 to 95 degrees) [1].
Disadvantages: Bad Temper (15) [-5*], Curious [-5*], Dependency (seawater, weekly) [10], Hard of Hearing (not in water, -10%) [-9], Loner (15) [-2*], Oblivious [-5], Selfish (15) [-2*].
Quirks: Broad-Minded [-1], Careful [-1], Imaginative [-1].
* Control numbers include effect of drug implant.
Features: Skin changes color with mood.

New Humans

Also known as Shuman, Shiseiji, and many more unprintable terms. If the Shahar get their way, these are the future of humanity. Among Wild Humans, New Humans get a -2 reaction penalty, but not among the bulk of the population. Point cost for a New Human is 4.

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: Will -1 [-5].
Advantages: High Manual Dexterity +2 [10], Single-Minded [5]
Disadvantages: Selfless [-5].
Quirks: Sterile (can be reversed by hormone shots) [-1].

Wild Humans

The human groups who are still actively trying to fight off the alien conquerers are known as "Wild Humans" both among themselves and to the Shahar. That they have managed to survive at all is impressive, but their lack of cooperation has greatly reduced their effectiveness at fighting the aliens.

The Immune

The Immune are humans who survived the Pacification Plague. They and their descendants are naturally resistant to the virus. The trait is recessive, however, so only children of two Immune parents are themselves Immunes (though they do carry the gene). All Immunes have the advantage Immunity to Pacification Plague [5 points].

Immunes have gathered in Great Britain, which was hit hard during the initial invasion. Today there are nearly two million Immunes living in the rebuilt sections of London. As one might expect, they are a mix of peoples from all over the Earth.

Organization

The Immune community has an organization which is both very informal and very secure. Families are the most important unit of Immune society, and the most prominent members of each family meet with other leaders to reach decisions. At the top are the inner circle known as "Elders" (though age is not the only qualification). One's importance within the Immune power structure largely mirrors one's social role in everyday life, so that the Elders are all people with substantial personal influence and resources.

Designer's Note

I wanted to provide a range of human rebel groups to support different campaign styles. The Seawolves are good for straight military adventure. The Immunes lend themselves to paranoia and intrigue. The Miranda group allows space adventure and the chance to voyage to other star systems. The Resistance is best for small-scale rebel activities, and makes a good starter frame for low-powered characters. Several of the original chapter vignettes chronicled the exploits of the Alien Fighter Army.

The clannishness of Immune society makes it very hard for anyone to infiltrate, and it feeds on and reinforces the need to keep the existence of the Immunes secret from outsiders.

The Immunes do not have much in the way of military hardware or weapons. They do maintain a few caches of small arms and explosives, but those are mostly for use defending the secret of the Immunes rather than for fighting the Shahar. Their biggest asset is simply their numbers and loyalty, as they have gradually infiltrated much of the Shahar administration in the ten provinces of the British Isles. This gives them excellent sources of information and a limited ability to influence policy by altering information.

Goals and Methods

The Immune leadership takes a very long view. Their plan is simply to exist and conceal their nature. Over time they will increase their numbers and gain access to higher positions within the Shahar government. They do have extremely good internal security and deep-cover infiltration techniques, and are very well-disciplined. They almost never resort to direct action, and on the very rare occasions when Immune leaders have authorized violence, the operations have been very thoroughly planned, with an emphasis on total secrecy.

Staying hidden is the keystone of Immune strategy. This means they must avoid any testing which might reveal their virus resistance. To compensate, a substantial proportion of Immunes have gone into medical professions. This also allows them to search for carriers of the Immune gene, and falsify records to conceal oddities in the distribution of antiviral drugs.

A small sub-faction of Immunes insist that the Shahar will eventually discover their existence, and either develop a completely new Pacification Plague or simply round up all the Immunes. This group wans to make common cause with other rebel factions and prepare for war. As yet, they have had no influence on the leaders.

Relations with Other Factions

The Immune are not on the best of terms with the other rebel groups. Many Immune leaders believe that the Shahar antiviral drugs somehow "tainted" the recipients, so that everyone who is not n Immune is no longer a true human. Most Earth-based wild humans think the Immunes are nothing more than an unusually eccentric Resistance band; only the top Seawolf command knows otherwise. They have limited contact with the Miranda colony, and a handful of Immunes have been smuggled off Earth to Miranda in the hope of eventually creating a resistant population there.

Sea Wolves

The Shahar homeworld is drier than Earth, and quirks of continental drift left it with few large ocean basins or strategic waterways. Naval warfare was never a major part of Shahar military thinking. During the invasion the Shahar were unable to locate many Terran submarines. Twenty subs -- mostly American and Russian -- were ordered to remain hidden as the nucleus of a resistance force. Over the past decades the submariners established secret bases in the Arctic and on the sea floor, made contact with other resistance organizations, and trained up new sailors to carry on the fight.

Leadership and Structure

The Seawolves consider themselves a military force and so have a very well-defined chain of command. The entire service is under the control of the SCAN (Supreme Commander, Allied Navies). Noncombatants are under Naval discipline.

Bases and Assets

At present the Seawolves have 12 nuclear submarines, carefully maintained and upgraded whenever possible with stolen Shahar technology. They also have a handful of small minisubs, surface boats, and a growing number of

aircraft. Over the years the Seawolves have stolen or built a number of special weapons, including nuclear X-ray laser warheads to knock out Shahar spacecraft and satellites, a powerful EMP weapon capable (in theory) of destroying electronics in an entire continent, and a giant particle accelerator occupying the whole length of a nuclear attack sub.

There are four main Seawolf bases. The biggest is Svoboda ("Freedom") on the sea floor north of Siberia. The core of the base is a Cold War relic: a hidden Soviet submarine resupply station. Today it is a cramped but thriving town of nearly 10,000 people, and is where most of the Seawolf construction and maintenance facilities are located. Next-largest is the semi-public base at Ducie Island, near Pitcairn Island in the Pacific. The Ducie settlement is apparently an outpost of refugees, living a simple life fishing and farming. Most of the Seawolf children and elderly live on Ducie.

The third biggest base is the research lab and backup maintenance facility on the Amery Ice Shelf in Antarctica. Amery is where the Seawolves analyze captured Shahar technology and try to develop weapons and countermeasures for use against the aliens. The smallest permanent Seawolf enclave is an underground complex on Ellesmere Island in northern Canada. It has powerful radio and optical monitoring equipment, and is used for eavesdropping on Shahar communications traffic and observing their ships in space. It is also a backup weapons store, and has the Seawolves' supply of land-based anti-space missiles.

Goals and Tactics

The Seawolves are not interested in anything less than the defeat of the Shahar. To accomplish this, they are pursuing three main goals. First, learning as much about enemy capabilities and weaknesses as possible. Second, developing weapons to use against them. Third, keeping the flame of resistance alive and remaining a force in being.

Intelligence-gathering is done by a variety of means. The Seawolves maintain contact with land-based resistance groups. Sometimes they make use of resistance organizations to support espionage missions by navy personnel. They also have an extensive network of listening and observation posts. The Seawolves are undoubtedly the best-informed faction of Wild Humans.

Weapon development has lagged behind, due to a crippling lack of scientists. The Seawolves do their best to figure out captured Shahar equipment, and have refitted some of their subs with alien weaponry.

Finally, supporting resistance and protecting their own existence is the task which takes up most of the resources of the Seawolves. They try to stay in contact with all of the other resistance groups. They also raid commercial shipping when no Shahar satellites are overhead.

Relations with Other Factions

The Seawolves try to remain on good terms with anyone who wants to fight the Shahar. They stay in touch with the Miranda colony via encrypted radio burst transmissions, and have agents all over the Earth. While most of the other resistance factions are grateful for the support and information the Seawolves provide, they do generate a certain amount of resentment because of their attitude that they are the only "real professionals" fighting the Shahar.

The Miranda Colony

During the chaos of the invasion, four human spacecraft managed to remain hidden, and arranged a rendezvous in orbit about the planet Uranus. The crews took refuge in the maze-like interior of the moon Miranda, and over the past 50 years the colony has grown to a population of 239 people. The Miranda colony has been carrying out a vast project to build self-replicating robot mining machinery and automated factories, so the human population is now dwarfed by the number of robots on Miranda -- approximately 20,000. With their robotic labor force, the Miranda group can offer immense space-based industrial capacity in the event of a full-scale revolt against the Shahar.

Leadership and Structure

The Miranda colony is entirely democratic, with all major decisions made by a vote of the adult population. Oversight of specific projects is assigned to individuals, who must report to the colony as a whole from time to time.

Because direct neural-interface links are part of daily life for the Miranda community, much of their decision-making is done over the colony's computer network. To outsiders, this makes the Miranda group look a lot like some kind of creepy hive mind. Coupled with their lavish use of cybernetic implants, this gives them an unsettling resemblance to sinister cyborgs in pre-invasion SF movies.

Bases and Assets

The colony is a large underground complex inside the Uranian moon Miranda. The moon's interior is a maze of faults and fracture planes, with large natural voids. The colony's mining operations have expanded on the original caves to create a vast network of passages and chambers extending hundreds of kilometers. The colony is now comfortably large for its few human inhabitants, and their hydroponic farms produce a steady (if not very diverse) supply of food.

To launch vehicles without telltale rocket flares, the colonists built a large magnetic catapult. Its exit is disguised as a crater, and waste heat is dumped into the moon's icy interior. Using the catapult, the Miranda rebels can put unmanned spacecraft anywhere in the Solar System with minimal chance of detection.

Of the four spacecraft which brought the refugees to Miranda, two had to be cannibalized to create the colony in the first place. The other two have been upgraded and armed, and are the core of a growing space fleet.

Objectives

The Miranda group is facing a crisis. The old rebels who dreamed of leading a robot armada to liberate Earth are becoming a minority. They are opposed by a newer faction which proposes to seek out a new home for humanity among the stars. Since both sides agree that there is a need for more spacecraft, the colony is expanding the shipyards. But until they can reach consensus and decide whether to build insystem warships or interstellar arks, very few craft are actually being launched.

Relations With Other Factions

The Miranda colony is physically the most isolated Wild Human group, and that makes it hard for them to keep in touch with the other factions. The Mirandans almost never communicate directly with Earth. Instead they use repeater drones or stealthy spacecraft to get messages to contacts on Mars or Earth, while satellites or probes pick up transmissions for relay to Miranda.

They have limited but secure contact with the Seawolves. The Mirandans see the Seawolves as reliable allies, but worry that their focus on Earth itself is too narrow. They have very little contact with the Immunes, since Mirandan cybernetic augmentation plays into the Immune attitude that they are the only true humans left. Their chief allies among the Resistance are the Alien Fighter Army in Japan and the Red Freedom group on Mars.

The Resistance

The Resistance is the term for a very loose, widespread group of rebels against the Shahar, spread across Earth and Mars. Its very diffuse nature has made it hard for the Shahar to wipe out completely, but it also limits the effectiveness of what could otherwise be the most powerful Wild Human group.

Leadership and Structure

The Resistance is made up of a great variety of groups with many different styles of organization. In North America and Australia, Resistance cells are mostly "militia" units with elected officers and a quasi-military chain of command.

In Europe and Latin America the Resistance follows the classic "cell" structure. Chinese and Russian groups are based on old criminal groups like the "Mafiya" or tongs. In South Asia and Africa the Resistance is less formally structured, and is usually based on family alliances. Japan's Resistance is an odd fusion of pre-invasion "Otaku" clubs and paranormal cultists, who call themselves the "Alien Fighter Army."

Bases and Assets

The one common element of Resistance groups is their desperate shortage of supplies and equipment. Most have nothing but small arms, with maybe a few old anti-tank rockets or grenades. In rural areas they may have a secret headquarters -- often an old bomb shelter.

What the Resistance does have is numbers. Worldwide there are nearly three million members. Unfortunately, this means the Resistance has the worst security of any of the Wild factions.

The most powerful Resistance sub-group is the Siberian Freedom Army, which preserves a remnant of the old Russian army and finances itself through protection rackets and vice operations at Siberian mining operations. The Siberian Freedom Army works closely with the Sea Wolves, and would likely be the nucleus of any land forces the submariners organize in the event of a general uprising.

Goals and Tactics

While all Resistance groups want to defeat the Shahar, most have secondary goals, usually related to how things will be run after the aliens leave. Conflict among Resistance cells is chronic, and probably half the Shahar arrests of Resistance members are sparked by anonymous tips from rivals within the movement.

Most Resistance groups content themselves with producing anti-Shahar propaganda, recruiting new members, and scrounging weapons to stockpile against The Day. More adventurous groups engage in small-scale sabotage, raids on isolated Shahar and occupation outposts, and occasional espionage.

Relations with Other Factions

As one would expect from a chaotic, undisciplined rebel movement, Resistance relations with other factions are changeable and unreliable. The Seawolves maintain ties with certain Resistance groups, especially the Siberian Freedom Army and the People's Liberation Force. The Immunes don't trust the Resistance at all, but a faction of the more activist Immunes have formed their own Resistance network in south Britain. The Miranda colony has made very tentative contact with the Alien Fighters Army in Japan.

Beyond Earth

Though the heart of the conflict between humans and Shahar is on Earth, both the Wild Humans and the aliens have operations on other worlds in the Solar System.

Earth Orbit and Luna

The invasion destroyed everything in Earth orbit, and the resulting debris coupled with some last-ditch "space denial weapons" fired by the Terrans left an unsafe zone stretching from the upper edge of the atmosphere all the way to geosynchronous orbit. For years Shahar spacecraft had to rendezvous with armored shuttles in high orbit.

A costly sweeping operation has been going on for 30 years now. The heart of

Designer's Note

One purpose of the Solar System section was to provide a "gazeteer" of the planets and moons in *GURPS Space* statistics. I've cut most of that out here in order to focus on the places relevant to the struggle against the Shahar.

the project are two giant "Dustpails" made of thick Kevlar reinforced with carbon nanotubes and layers of aerogel. Each Dustpail is a cone 100 meters wide and 200 meters long, controlled by steering jets on the rim of the mouth. They circle the Earth in elliptical retrograde orbits, swinging between geosynch and low orbit against the normal orbital motion of the debris, scooping up fragments with each pass.

The chance of getting hit by debris is low enough for spacecraft to visit Earth without much danger, but still too high for permanent bases in orbit. In low orbit (up to 200 miles altitude) and geosynchronous orbit, where the debris is most concentrated, a spacecraft has a 1 in 200 chance per hour of getting hit by something big enough to do damage (roll 3d each hour, on a 3 the vehicle takes 1d damage). Between geosynch and low orbit the chance is 1 in 200 per day.

Because Earth orbit is so unsafe, the Shahar concentrate their space assets in lunar orbit or on the surface of the Moon. The heart of their lunar presence is the old Chinese base at Mare Fecundatis, which has been enlarged into a city of 100,000 people (about half humans, with the rest Shahar, Ascended, Tarcaseru, and New Humans).

Mars

When the Shahar invasion fleet arrived, there were already 150 people on Mars. The Shahar decided to continue the terraforming program. Their technology has greatly accelerated the project, and today there are a million people on Mars and its moons. Half are New Humans, another fourth are unmodified humans, and the remainder are Shahar and Ascended.

The primary settlement on Mars is the orbital elevator terminal atop Pavonis Mons. There, a multilevel city occupies the whole mountaintop, and is home to 300,000 people. Pavonis City also houses the Shahar garrison unit for Mars: two regiments of human infantry (2,000 troops) and a squadron of Shahar aerospace fighters.

Rebel activity on Mars is limited by the hostile environment. Any overt resistance would have disastrous results. The Shahar have used a sophisticated program of memetic warfare to channel dissent among Martians into anti-Terran sentiment.

Miranda

Miranda is the smallest and innermost of Uranus's five large moons. It circles the planet every 34 hours, and keeps one face to Uranus. Miranda's diameter is 217 miles, and its surface gravity is about 0.015 G. The local temperature is typically -335 degrees Fahrenheit. Uranus orbits the Sun at an average distance of about 19 AU, taking 84 years to make a circuit.

Miranda is a mass of rock and ice with a curious patchwork appearance. At some point in its history Miranda was shattered by an impact with a large body, and the fragments recombined in a new arrangement. The interior of Miranda is a maze of fractures and chasms, which the colonists have used to hide their base, deep beneath Prospero crater.

Outside the Solar System

The Shahar control 14 star systems, occupying a roughly egg-shaped volume of space 100 light-years long by 50 wide, extending toward the constellation Scorpio. The Shahar home system lies near the center.

The Gustrogin and Tarcaser home systems are on the far side of the egg, fairly close together. Qas, the Qasuti homeworld, is the closest to Earth, and was the staging area for the conquest of humanity. The Ascended home system is somewhat apart from the others, "up" along the Galactic axis from Ahur.

In addition to the home systems there are eight colony systems within Shahar space. The newest colony project is the planet Karar, along the route between

Earth and Qas.

Karar

The Karar system is the only other place where humans are found in large numbers. It is a binary K2 pair with a large gas giant orbiting one partner. The giant has six large moons, of which two are lifebearing worlds and a third is a promising subject for terraforming. All three moons are tidally locked to their giant primary.

The inner moon is entirely covered by ocean. The majority of inhabitants are Qasuti, but there are half a dozen floating settlements for other species. The population is 260,000, of which 15,000 are New Humans.

The third moon is the size of Mars and has a thriving native biosphere. The Shahar colony has a population of just under 1 million, including 50,000 New Humans.

The fourth moon is the largest, with a mass half that of Earth, but an unbreathable methane atmosphere. The Shahar plan to terraform it, and there is a small base with a few New Humans among the staff.

The Wild Humans of the Solar System know little about the human colonists at Karar. Presumably they are there as a test of their ability to fit into the Family of Species structure. One key unknown is how the success or failure of the project will affect the rest of humanity. If the New Humans turn out to be a bad fit with the Shahar and their other subject species, will the Shahar try more modifications -- or choose extermination?

bloodless and non-destructive as possible, so that this isn't a postapocalyptic landscape.

I also wanted to give the aliens ostensibly benevolent motives. They think they're doing good, and there's a significant number of humans who have come to agree with them. That means the rebellion is as much a war of ideas as it is one of guns and bombs. It should be possible to run a low-combat campaign in which convincing key individuals is as effective as blowing stuff up.

Worlds of Power

for the *d20 System*

by Nicholas Luna

As the slathering creatures surrounded the party, our mage's brow was damp with sweat as he struggled to muster a power I'd seen him tap a thousand times before. No doubt about it: If we didn't escape this strange world fast, we were likely to leave it as dinner and spirits.

* * *

This article provides rules for varying the level of magical energy available in a game world. This provides a measure for you to create worlds where magic doesn't function as easily as it does in standard *d20 System* worlds, to a world where magic is one of the most potent forces available to mortals.

World Mana Level

Different worlds have differing amounts of ambient magical energy. This magical energy is the Mana Level. The World Mana Level affects the use of magic on a planetary (or greater) scale.

The World Mana Level has a minimum rating of -10 (dead magic) and theoretically no upper limit, although +10 is a practical limit.

Rating	Magic	Examples
-10	Impeded Magic X	Dead magic. Spells, spell-like abilities, and supernatural abilities simply do not function at this WML.
-9	Impeded Magic IX	This is the WML for "real" Earth, and similar "realistic" Earth worlds -- for game purposes.
-8	Impeded Magic VIII	
-7	Impeded Magic VII	
-6	Impeded Magic VI	
-5	Impeded Magic V	This is the WML for worlds such as Earth when Howard's most famous barbarian ruled.
-4	Impeded Magic IV	
-3	Impeded Magic III	
-2	Impeded Magic II	This is the WML for worlds such as Earth when ancient beings from beyond the stars dreamed.
-1	Impeded Magic I	This is the WML for worlds such as Earth during and after Armageddon.
+0	Normal	This is the WML for worlds like standard *d20 System* fantasy worlds, or Earth during the Sixth Sun of the Mayan Long Count. Spells, spell-like abilities, and supernatural abilities function normally.
+1	Enhanced	This is the WML for worlds such as Earth during the Fourth Sun of the

	Magic I	Mayan Long Count.
+2	Enhanced Magic II	
+3	Enhanced Magic III	This is the WML for worlds such as Earth in the future when the remnants of humanity battle each other and numerous creatures from multiple dimensions using magic and high technology.
+4	Enhanced Magic IV	
+5	Enhanced Magic V	
+6	Enhanced Magic VI	
+7	Enhanced Magic VII	
+8	Enhanced Magic VIII	
+9	Enhanced Magic IX	
+10	Enhanced Magic X	

Effects on Spells/Spell-like/Supernatural Abilities

Impeded Magic

For effects based on caster level, subtract the WML from the character's caster level to determine the spell effects. For effects not based on caster level, reduce them by (WML   10%). Increase casting times by a multiple equal to the Impeded Magic level. Fortitude and Will saves against spells receive a bonus equal to the Impeded Magic level.

For example, a 7th-level mage on a WML -5 world is going to cast a *fly* spell. This will take him (1   5) 5 standard actions to cast (essentially two full-round actions and a standard action). The duration, which would normally be seven minutes (one minute/level) is two minutes (-5 caster level) and if a creature resists, he has a +5 bonus to his Will save.

Enhanced Magic

For effects based on caster level, add the WML to the caster's effective level. Fortitude and Will save DCs are increased by the WML.

Spells, spell-like abilities, and supernatural abilities cast in enhanced magic areas automatically have certain Metamagic feats applied to them with no additional cost in spell points or spell slots.

- **Enhanced Magic I:** Spells are automatically affected by Empower Spell.
- **Enhanced Magic II:** Spells are automatically affected by Empower Spell, and Enlarge Spell.
- **Enhanced Magic III:** Spells are automatically affected by Empower Spell, Enlarge Spell, and Widen Spell.
- **Enhanced Magic IV:** Spells are automatically affected by Empower Spell, Enlarge Spell, Extend Spell, and Widen Spell.
- **Enhanced Magic V:** Spells are automatically affected by Empower Spell, Enlarge Spell, Extend Spell, Maximize Spell, and Widen Spell.
- **Enhanced Magic VI:** Spells are automatically affected by Empower Spell, Enlarge Spell, Extend Spell, Maximize Spell, and Widen Spell.

Enhanced Magic VII: Spells are automatically affected by Empower Spell, Enlarge Spell, Extend Spell, Maximize Spell, and Widen Spell.

- **Enhanced Magic VIII:** Spells are automatically affected by Empower Spell, Enlarge Spell, Extend Spell, Maximize Spell, Quicken Spell, and Widen Spell.
- **Enhanced Magic IX:** Spells are automatically affected by Empower Spell, Enlarge Spell, Extend Spell, Heighten Spell (+1), Maximize Spell, Quicken Spell, and Widen Spell.
- **Enhanced Magic X:** Spells are automatically affected by Empower Spell, Enlarge Spell, Extend Spell, Heighten Spell (+2), Maximize Spell, Quicken Spell, and Widen Spell.

For example, a 7th-level spellcaster on a +3 WML world is casting a *fireball* spell. His effective caster level is 10th, so the range of the spell is 800 ft. (400 ft.+400 ft.), and the spell is automatically Empowered, Enlarged, and Widened. This increases the range to 1,600 feet, the fireball affects a 40-ft. radius spread, and -- assuming the character puts all available damage dice into the spell -- it deals 15d6 points of damage.

Effects on Spellcasters

On worlds with Impeded Magic, spellcasters find their effective caster level reduced, as noted above. In addition, the number of spells they can use in a day is reduced. The caster level reduction applies when determining how many spell slots, or spell points the character receives. This also applies to caster level checks, such as required to penetrate spell resistance. On worlds with Enhanced Magic, the caster level increase provides a greater number of useable spells or spell points, and to caster level checks to penetrate spell resistance.

For example, on a -4 world, a 5th-level Wizard has the spell complement of a 1st-level Wizard (3 level-0 spells, 1st-level spells, or 2 spell points).

However, on a +4 world, the 5th-level Wizard would have the spell complement of a 9th-level Wizard.

Note however, that the WML has no effect on the maximum spell level of spells that a character can use.

Effects on Spellcasting

Impeded Magic

To cast a spell on a world with the Impeded Magic traits (-1 to -9), the spellcaster must roll a caster level check. The DC for this check is 20 + spell level + Impeded Magic Level. So, if a mage wants to cast fireball while on a WML -5 world, he must roll a caster level check with a DC of 20 + 3 + 5 = 28.

Enhanced Magic

Casting a spell on an Enhanced Magic world is the same as casting a spell on a +0 world, with the modifications to the spells as described above.

Effects on Magic Items

The effects of magic are based on the WML in which they are created. Taking items from one WML to another can alter the power of the item.

Armor and Shields: For the basic bonus provided, apply the difference between the creation WML and the current WML to the bonus. For example, a +1 heavy wooden shield created on a standard **_d20 System_** world (+0) is taken to a +3 WML world. So on the +3 WML world, the shield is in practice, a +4 heavy wooden shield. A +1 heavy wooden shield created on +3 WML world and taken to a -1 WML world would provide no magical bonuses. Other armor abilities function as described, unless they duplicate an effect that would be modified by caster level or the other rules

concerning the WML. Items that provide skill bonuses apply the same modifier as the enhancement bonus x2.

Weapons: Weapons are modified in the same manner as armor and shields.

Potions: Potions simply provide spell effects, and are modified in the same manner as spells.

Rings: Rings the duplicate spell effects are modified as per spells. Rings that provide skill bonuses are modified in the same way as armor and shields. Adjudicate other effects as necessary.

Rods: Rods that act as weapons are modified as per weapons. Rods that duplicate spell effects are modified as per spells. Rods that provide skill bonuses are modified as per armor and shields. Adjudicate other effects as necessary.

Scrolls: Scrolls simply provide spell effects, and are modified in the same manner as spells.

Staffs: Staffs provide spell effects, and are modified in the same manner as spells.

Wands: Wands provide spell effects, and are modified in the same manner as spells.

Wondrous Items: Wondrous items can provide a wealth of abilities. Determine which effect described above is closest to the power of a wondrous item and modify as appropriate. For other effects, adjudicate as necessary.

Item Creation: The most significant effect of WML on magic items is in the creation process. In an Impeded setting, increases the experience point cost of an item by (Impeded Magic level   10%). For example, in a -5 world, the experience point cost is increased by 50%. Magic items cannot be created in a -10 setting.

In Enhanced Magic settings, the experience point cost is reduced by (Enhanced Magic level   10%). So on a +3 WML world, magic items cost 70% of the normal experience point cost. In a +10 setting, the cost is reduced by 95%. In worlds with a +11 or better, the reduction increases by one point to a maximum reduction of 99%.

Note that the caster level modification for WML applies to the caster level of magic items.

Effects on Creatures

The World Mana Level can have an effect on the following creature types -- Constructs, Dragons, Elementals, Fey, Outsiders, and Undead. Apply the following to these creature types. All of these creature types have a base World Mana Level, based on the world in which they originated. (In most cases, use the stats as if from a +0 world, then modify.) As with armor and shields, if the creature moves to a setting with a higher WML, it gains benefits, while a creature that moves to a lower WML suffers penalties.

- **Strength:** The creature's Strength increases or decreases by double the WML difference.
- **Constitution:** The creature's Constitution increases or decreases by the WML difference.
- **Hit Points:** Multiply the WML difference by 5%, and multiply the creature's hit points by this amount after determining its new Constitution score.
- **Massive Damage:** Add the WML difference $\times 5$ to the creature's Massive Damage Threshold.
- **Defense:** The creature gains or loses a natural armor bonus equal to the WML difference.
- **Damage Reduction:** The creature gains or loses damage reduction equal to the $2\times$ the WML difference. If the creature does not normally have damage reduction and moves to a higher WML, it gains DR equal to 2x WML difference/magic.
- **Spell Resistance:** The creature's SR increases or decreases by double the WML difference.
- **Spell-like/Supernatural Abilities:** These are modified in the same manner as spells.
- **Challenge Rating:** Figure on a case-by-case basis.
- **Level Adjustment:** Figure on a case-by-case basis.

As an example, a ghoul from a +0 WML world:

Medium Undead

Hit Dice: 2d12 (13 hp)
Initiative: +2
Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares)
Armor Class/Defense: 14 (+2 Dex, +2 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 12
Base Attack/Grapple: +1/+2
Attack: Bite +2 melee (1d6+1 plus paralysis)
Full Attack: Bite +2 melee (1d6+1 plus paralysis) and 2 claws +0 melee (1d3 plus paralysis)
Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks: Ghoul fever, paralysis
Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft., undead traits, +2 turn resistance
Saves: Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +5
Abilities: Str 13+1, Dex 15+2, Con --, Int 13+1, Wis 14+2, Cha 12+1
Skills: Balance +6, Climb +5, Hide +6, Jump +5, Move Silently +6, Spot +7.
Feats: Multiattack.
Challenge Rating: 1.

Ghoul Fever (Su): Disease--bite, Fortitude DC 12, incubation period 1 day, damage 1d3 Con and 1d3 Dex. The save DC is Charisma-based.

An afflicted humanoid who dies of ghoul fever rises as a ghoul at the next midnight. A humanoid who becomes a ghoul in this way retains none of the abilities it possessed in life. It is not under the control of any other ghouls, but it hungers for the flesh of the living and behaves like a normal ghoul in all respects. A humanoid of 4 Hit Dice or more rises as a ghast, not a ghoul.

Paralysis (Ex): Those hit by a ghoul's bite or claw attack must succeed on a DC 12 Fortitude save or be paralyzed for 1d4+1 rounds. Elves have immunity to this paralysis. The save DC is Charisma-based.

If this ghoul finds himself transported to a +3 WML world, he will have the following statistics.

Medium Undead

Hit Dice: 2d12 (15 hp)
Initiative: +2
Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares)
Armor Class/Defense: 17 (+2 Dex, +5 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 15
Base Attack/Grapple: +1/+5
Attack: Bite +5 melee (1d6+1 plus paralysis)
Full Attack: Bite +5 melee (1d6+1 plus paralysis) and 2 claws +3 melee (1d3 plus paralysis)
Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks: Ghoul fever, paralysis
Special Qualities: Damage reduction 6/magic, darkvision 60 ft., undead traits, +2 turn resistance
Saves: Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +5
Abilities: Str 19+4, Dex 15+2, Con --, Int 13+1, Wis 14+2, Cha 12+1
Skills: Balance +6, Climb +8, Hide +6, Jump +5, Move Silently +6, Spot +7.
Feats: Multiattack.
Challenge Rating: 2.

Ghoul Fever (Su): Disease -- bite, Fortitude DC 15, incubation period 1 day, damage 1d6 Con and 1d6 Dex. The save DC is Charisma-based.

An afflicted humanoid who dies of ghoul fever rises as a ghoul at the next midnight. A humanoid who becomes a

ghoul in this way retains none of the abilities it possessed in life. It is not under the control of any other ghouls, but it hungers for the flesh of the living and behaves like a normal ghoul in all respects. A humanoid of 4 Hit Dice or more rises as a ghast, not a ghoul.

Paralysis (Ex): Those hit by a ghoul's bite or claw attack must succeed on a DC 12 Fortitude save or be paralyzed for 1d4+1 rounds. Elves have immunity to this paralysis. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Lines of Power and Intersections

Ley lines (also leys, dragon lines, lines of power) are lines of magic and psychic energy that some say crisscross the Earth, and are also part of many other worlds. These lines of power can increase the power of spells, spell-like abilities, and supernatural abilities, simply by being in proximity of the lines.

Ley Line Ratings

Ley lines vary in power, much as spellcasters do. Every ley line has a rating, ranging from 1 to 5. This rating acts as a bonus to a spellcaster's caster level, or to the effective caster level of a spell-like or supernatural ability. A character's proximity to a ley line affects the bonus he receives as detailed on the table below.

Distance	Effect
0-20 ft.	Listed line rating
21-100 ft.	Line rating -1
101-1,000 ft.	Line rating -2
1,001 ft.-0.5 miles	Line rating -3
0.5-1 mile	Line rating -4

Intersections, locations where two or more ley lines connect, provide similar bonuses. The rating of a ley line intersection is equal to the rating of the most powerful ley line in the intersection, plus one-half the rating of the next most powerful ley line (round down), plus one per additional ley line (or 0.25 if the remaining lines are rating 1). Ley intersections use the table above to determine rating reduction by distance.

In addition to a caster level increase, proximity to a ley line can provide a spellcaster with additional spell points to draw on. A spellcaster receives the effective rating in bonus spell points every round. These spell points must be used during the round they are received (therefore, they do not build up from round to round). If the caster leaves the area, he loses access to the points.

If you are using a spell slot system, as per standard *d20 System* rules, then instead of additional spell points, there is a chance that a used spell slot is not actually used. To determine this, roll 1d20 plus the line or intersection rating against a DC of 25 + effective spell level. If successful, the spell slot is not used and thus, can be reused. The slot can be reused to cast the spell that had occupied it, or it can be filled with a new spell following the normal rules.

For example, if Bob is 15 feet away from a rating 6 intersection, and he casts fireball, a 3rd level spell, the check is 1d20+6 against DC 28. If successful, that 3rd level slot is not treated as used for the day.

Special Times

Ley lines and intersections can provide additional power during certain times.

Astrological Alignment: When the planets and the stars align in certain patterns, the ley lines and intersections on a world can flare up, providing extra energy. Depending on the pattern, an astrological alignment can increase the ratings of ley lines and intersections from +1 to +10. However, when an astrological alignment increases a rating to more than 5, spellcasters that draw power from the ley lines and intersections suffer damage with every spell cast. This damage equals the effective rating -5.

For example, the planets have aligned, providing a +4 increase to ley line ratings. Mick, a spellcaster, draws on the power of a rating 4 ley line to increase a fireball spell. The effective ley line rating is 8, so Mick suffers 3 points of damage when he casts the spell.

Equinox: On the equinox days, ley line energy increases significantly -- add +5 to the ratings of the ley lines. However, when an equinox increases a rating to more than 5, spellcasters that draw power from the ley lines and intersections suffer damage with every spell cast. This damage equals the effective rating -5.

Solar Eclipse: A solar eclipse increases the ratings of ley lines by +2. However, when an eclipse increases a rating to more than 5, spellcasters that draw power from the ley lines and intersections suffer damage with every spell cast. This damage equals the effective rating -5.

Solstice: On the solstice days, ley line energy increases significantly -- add +5 to the ratings of the ley lines. However, when a solstice increases a rating to more than 5, spellcasters that draw power from the ley lines and intersections suffer damage with every spell cast. This damage equals the effective rating -5.

Mini-Character Lenses for GURPS

by Eric B. Smith

A mini-character lens is a small template that cost just 10 points which can be used to help flesh out a character, giving the character knowledge in an area of expertise that he might not otherwise have. This can explain a misspent youth, cross-training on a starship crew, or just dabbling in another field. Most of these lenses are composed of skills.

A *GURPS Character Assistant* file for this article is available HERE.

These lenses work particularly well when combined with character templates from the various *GURPS* books, allowing characters to fill niches outside of the primary one the template is designed for. You could also create a smaller version of most of these templates for just 5 points simply by cutting the points in the listed skills in half.

Remembered Skills

"My father's plane; I trained on it!"
-- Kate Brewster (Conner), *Terminator 3*

Often in fiction a character suddenly remembers that he knows just the skills that are necessary to save himself or the party from certain doom -- they can fly the plane, hack into the computer system, or pick the lock to get the team on to the next phase of the adventure. These mini-lenses can be purchases as a "potential lens" in advance, paying the 10 points for a lens plus an Unusual Background of 2-5 points, but just when the need is greatest you may pick any appropriate mini-lens and add it to the character, removing the Unusual Background and reducing the point cost of the character appropriately. The GM may even allow the player to create the mini-lens himself; the key is that it must contain two or more *related* skills that are important at the moment and are somehow linked through the characters past.

The Lenses

Breaking & Entry Specialist

You know how to break into buildings covertly, or possibly using brute force. Perhaps you did some second story work, or you used to install security systems. Half the knack of breaking & entry is in knowing where, and when, to break and enter.

Lockpicking/TL (A) IQ [2], Observation (A) Per [2], and 6 points from among Climbing or Stealth both (A) DX [2], Electronics Operation/TL (Security) (A) IQ [2] or IQ+1 [4], or Forced Entry (E) DX+1 [2] or DX+2 [4].

Engineer

The most important skill for a ships Engineer is not Engineer, but rather Mechanic. Engineer represents skill in how to *design*something; Mechanic represents skill in how to *fix*something. A good ships Engineer will likely have skill in both, particularly if he speaks with a thick Scottish accent.

The other important concern with designing an Engineer is what the specialty for Mechanic and/or Engineer will be. The most useful specialty for most adventurers will probably be based on Vehicle Type - Starship, Automobile, or Light Airplane are probably good choices.

Engineer/TL (type) (H) IQ-1 [2], Mechanic/TL (same type) (A) IQ+2 [8]

Gunner

Whether a Tank Gunner, the Gunner onboard a Naval Ship or Starship, or the man who aims and fires the Howitzers used in Artillery battalions, all use the basic skills. A Gunner should not only know how to fire his weapon, but also how to maintain it and fix it, particularly in the event of misfires.

Armoury/TL (Heavy Weapons) IQ [2], and 8 points either Artillery/TL (any) (A) IQ+1 [4] or IQ+2 [8] and/or Gunner/TL (any) (E) DX+2 [4] or DX+3 [8].

Hacker

Cinematic Computer Hackers are a staple of the *Cyberpunk* genre, and common in other genres. Many times a character in a story just happens to know a "little bit" about computers, and can hack into the computer systems in a nick of time. Being a Hacker isn't easy; not only do you have to know how to break into computer systems but you also need to keep up to date on all the latest technologies so as not to be outclassed or surprised by a new innovation.

Computer Hacking/TL (VH) IQ-1 [4], Computer Programming/TL (H) IQ-2 [1], Current Affairs/TL (Science & Technology) (E) IQ [1], and Expert Skill (Computer Security) (H) IQ [4].

For a realistic Hacker replace Computer Hacking with Computer Operation/TL (E) IQ+1 [2], Electronics Repair/TL (Computers) (A) IQ [2].

Journalist

Many a person has aspired to be a journalist. With pen and paper, a video camera, or internet access just about anyone can be. Of course, the *good* journalists check their sources, but many people have made their living rumor mongering or ambushing their interviewies.

Research (A) IQ [2], Writing (A) IQ [2], Electronics Operation (Media) (A) IQ-1 [2], and 4 points in Public Speaking or Photography both (A) IQ [2], Fast-Talk or Interrogation (A) IQ [2], Detect Lies (H) Per-1 [2], or Current Affairs/TL (any) (E) IQ+1 [2].

Medic

A Medic has been trained in basic First Aid, perhaps as a corpsman in the Military or to work as a paramedic in an Ambulance crew. The training is more directed towards "scoop and run" than long term care.

Diagnosis/TL (H) IQ-1 [2], Electronics Operation/TL (Medical) (A) IQ [2], First Aid/TL (E) IQ+2 [4], and 2 points in a combination of Pharmacy/TL or Poisons/TL both (H) IQ-2 [1] or IQ-1 [2].

In a low tech setting replace Electronics Operation with an extra 2 points in Diagnosis (H) IQ [4].

Pickpocket

A pickpocket has spent some time on the street thieving -- picking pockets, cutting purses, shoplifting, or scamming passers by.

Knife (E) DX+1 [2], Fast-Talk (A) IQ [2], Filch (A) DX [2], Pickpocket (H) DX-1 [2], Sleight of Hand (H) DX-2 [1], Streetwise (A) IQ-1 [1]

Pilot

The chief skill of a ship's pilot is, not unsurprisingly, Pilot, though for small naval ships use Boating and for large vessels use Seamanship or Submariner. Most Pilots should also have skill in an appropriate Navigation skill, and many ships require more than one specialty to pilot properly: A space ship which can land on a planet's surface then take off and fly to the moon may require Piloting (Aerospace) and Piloting (High-Performance Spacecraft), while a sailboat which has a supplemental motor would require both Boating (Sailboat) and either Boating (Large Powerboat) or Boating (Motorboat).

2 points in Navigation/TL (any) IQ-1 [1]x2 or IQ [2], and 8 points from among Boating/TL (any) (A) DX+1 [4] or DX+2 [8], Seamanship/TL or Submariner/TL both (E) IQ+2 [4] or IQ+3 [8], Submarine (any) or Piloting/TL (any) (A) DX+1 [4] or DX+2 [8]

Socialite

You get along well in social situations, and can sometimes convice others to go along with your ideas.

Charisma 1 [5], Fast-Talk (A) IQ [2], either Savior-Faire (Any) (E) IQ+1 [2] or Streetwise (A) IQ [2], and one of Carousing (E) HT [1], Diplomacy (H) IQ-2 [1], Intimidation (A) Will-1 [1], Sex Appeal (A) HT [1], Leadership or Public Speaking both (A) IQ-1 [1].

Storyteller

A storyteller likes to tell stories or jokes, and is quite adept at keeping his companions entertained during those long boring times that can sometimes happen between adventures.

Expert Skill (Bardic Lore) (H) IQ-1 [2], Public Speaking (Storytelling or Jokes)* (E) IQ+2 [4], and 4 points among Research (A) IQ [2], Singing (E) HT+1 [2], or Current Affairs (any) (E) IQ+1 [2] or IQ+2 [4].

*Note: These are *optional specialties* of the Public Speaking skill, reducing difficult from (A) to (E).

Survivalist

A Survivalist has spent some time in the wild hunting, fishing, and camping. If dropped into the wild with at least some tools he stands a decent chance of surviving and even thriving.

Naturalist (H) IQ-1 [2], Navigation (Land) (A) IQ-1 [1], Survival (Any) (A) Per [2], 2 points in one of Guns/TL (Musket, Rifle, or Shotgun), Beam Weapons/TL (Rifle) all (E) DX+1 [2], Bow or Spear Thrower both (A) DX [2], or Crossbow (E) DX+1 [2], and 3 points from among Climbing (A) DX-1 [1] or DX [2], Fishing (E) Per [1] or Per+1 [2], Hiking (A) HT-1 [1] or HT [2], Swimming (E) HT [1] or HT+1 [2], or Tracking (A) Per-1 [1] or Per [2].

Spellcaster

Creating a list of spells which are always useful is almost impossible, but what isn't difficult is to give a list of spells which are easy to acquire. A typical dabbler spell caster will either have Magery 0 [5] and 5 points in spells or 10 points in spells and live or work in a high mana zone (or a high sanctity zone) where he can cast his spells.

The first list of spells consists of spells with no prerequisites. Anybody can pick them up with minimal training. This list can also be useful if trying to build a Mage with a spell that has a prerequisite of something like "1 spell from 10 different colleges." All of these spells listed here are (H) IQ-2 [1] or IQ-1 [2].

Air: Seek Air, Purify Air.
Body Control: Climbing, Debility, Itch, Touch.
Communication & Empathy: Sense Foes, Sense Life.

Earth: Seek Earth.
Enchantment: One-College Powerstone.
Fire: Ignite Fire, Seek Fire.
Food: Seek Food, Test Food.
Knowledge: Tell Time.
Light & Darkness: Light.
Making & Breaking: Inspired Creation.
Mind Control: Dull Hearing, Dull Taste and Smell, Dull Vision, Keen Hearing, Keen Taste and Smell, Keen Vision.
Movement: Haste.
Plant: Seek Plant.
Sound: Keen Hearing, Sound.
Technological: See Radiation, Seek Fuel, Seek Machine/TL, Seek Plastic, Seek Power/TL, Test Fuel/TL.
Water: Seek Water.

The second list of spells consists of spells which have just one prerequisite. The prerequisites are listed in (parenthesis) after the spell or spells they apply to.

Air: Create Air, No-Smell, Stench (Purify Air).
Body Control: Spasm, Tickle (Itch).
Communication & Empathy: Sense Emotion (Sense Foes).
Earth: Seek Pass, Shape Earth (Seek Earth).
Fire: Create Fire, Extinguish Fire, Shape Fire (Ignite Fire).
Food: Decay, Season (Test Food).
Healing: Body-Reading (Sense Life).
Light & Darkness: Colors, Continual Light, Remove Shadow, Shape Light (Light).
Movement: Glue, Grease (Haste).
Plant: Identify Plant (Seek Plant).
Protection & Warning: Sense Danger (Sense Foes).
Sound: Silence, Thunderclap, Voices (Sound), Sound Vision (Keen Hearing).
Technological: Identify Metal (Seek Earth), Identify Plastic (Seek Plastic), Magnetic Vision (Keen Vision), Preserve Fuel/TL (Test Fuel/TL), Radio Hearing (Keen Hearing), Reveal Function/TL (Seek Machine/TL).
Water: Purify Water, Seek Coastline (Seek Water).

Things I Hate as a Player (GM Edition)

Given the pattern of What Hath Gone Before, this should be the week where I'm lovey-feely and espouse the various traits of players that I, as a GM, love. Unfortunately, I'm in a somewhat cranky mood, having filed my taxes this past year. While it's flattering that the government thinks our household is doing so well, I am nevertheless taken aback by the need to send off checks that total more than I spent on my first car (which, for those of you playing the phone game, came to pass a mere three years ago or so).

So, I'll be jumping around a smidge and indulging my current cantankerous nature by looking at things I hate about GMs from the player's side of the duck blind.

* * *

Puzzles for which there is only one possible solution. Actually, any encounter for which there is only one possible solution. Too many GMs treat their scenarios like *Choose Your Own Adventures* on LSD, where one wrong decision will subject the players to horrible punishment (and the players don't have the *Choose-Your-Own-Adventure* advantage of using their fingers as bookmarks to rewind). Obscure riddles with one answer, puzzles that have one solution, suspects that require one specific question to unlock the answer, and so on. (Yes, I know I'm guilty of this. I apologized, flagellated myself, and sought forgiveness.)

Players are good at coming up with nonobvious solutions to problems; I suspect that most players pride themselves on those moments of clarity when the pieces fall into place, and an answer appears. Sure, it might not be the answer the GM was thinking of, but as a GM I've started leaning more toward "let the solution possibly work." But too many of these conundrums are warded -- by design or GM fiat -- against alternate possibilities.

This thing-I-hate is closely related to . . .

* * * **Adventures that are specifically designed to thwart the special abilities of the party.** Now, I don't mind the occasional "This room is protected from teleportation attempts" or the like, but far too many GMs layer on the anti-ability paint with a gloopy abandon. (Are there any classic *Dungeons & Dragons* adventures where every square inch of a 17-mile dungeon isn't protected from *teleport, dimension door, passwall, dig, find the path, true sight,* and so on? How often does the phrase "by no means other than a *wish*" appear?) Similarly far too many NPCs have special doohickery that renders them immune to mind reading, knowing alignment, etc. ("Good gravy; how many *amulets of protection from scrying that only work for one specific person* are there in the universe?!")

Yes, I know that I bemoaned in an earlier installment that I hate it when games give abilities such as detect lies or mind-reading. Here's the rule: If the GM doesn't want to deal with an ability, he shouldn't allow it in the campaign. For example, in most *Dungeons & Dragons* games I've run, I've declared that most divination abilities are unpredictable . . . especially means designed to reveal alignment or the like.

Seriously: If I were playing a game as a mighty soldier, and every campaign consisted of my character's arms getting broken, I'd eventually give up and revert to sudoku. So why do so many GMs think it's okay to strip a character of an ability just because they don't want to deal with it?

* * *

Campaigns where NPCs become the be-all and end-all of the campaign. One memorable campaign series I played in consisted of the PCs rescuing and escorting a powerful NPC to the location of another NPC; the climactic adventure detailed how the two of them duked it out while the rest of us were relegated to mopping up the minions of the big-bad-powerful NPC. There was nothing any of us could do to influence the outcome of this scene, and the final battle was resolved as a series of NPC-to-NPC rolls made by the GM behind the screen. (Why this step was necessary, I don't know. Maybe to enhance the sense that "anything can happen" . . . although in actuality it's "anything can happen, but nothing we have any say over.") By the end I had considered requesting to be replaced by my Apple IIgs (this was

a while ago), with a BASIC program that would generate my character's required dice rolls with a press of the space bar.

While a lot of published adventures have the problem of being led around by powerful NPCs (**War's End** for **Torg?** I'm looking at you . . . through a piece of pinhole-poked cardboard), I've also encountered this structure time and again from other GMs in their own campaigns. I suspect there are a number of reasons for it -- this structure allows the players a chance to interact with the bigwigs of the gaming world, it's a means of providing a degree of structure without the usual single-corridor dungeon of usual railroading. But it still drives me up a wall; after all, if the roles of the characters can be taken by anyone with a weapon and the players replaced interchangeably by any schlub with a handful of dice, what's the point?

And speaking of railroading . . .

* * *

Campaigns where there is only one choice. I'm reminded of a tale from a friend about an adventure where the PCs were met by a mysterious stranger with the offer of adventure. The players all immediately recognized that this NPC was evil and trying to trick them into doing his bidding (a classic trope of many tales), but -- recognizing this -- the heroes had almost no choice but to do the bidding of the bad guy, since the GM made it perfectly clear that there wouldn't be an adventure that day unless they played along. (I'm not sure if the players chose "adventure at gunpoint" over "screw this; we're playing Tecmo Super Bowl.")

Now, I'm a big fan of old light-gun games like *Area 51* and *House of the Dead,* even though these "rail shooters" lead the players around on a controlled railway path like a Disney World ride. But there's a wide gulf between a video game and an RPG (despite what the general populous thinks), and one of the great things about roleplaying is the illusion of unlimited freedom. Unfortunately, being presented with only one choice -- especially if you as a player don't *like* that choice -- is one of those things I hate.

As an aside, the "tricked by Bad Guy to undertake evil mission" was also a central conceit of the **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 2nd Edition** adventure **The Apocalypse Stone.** Unfortunately, I don't recall seeing anything in there about what to do if the PCs see through this seemingly obvious-to-me ruse.

* * *

That's it for this issue of hate. We should be back with the love for the next couple of weeks, unless I find myself needing to spend another $15K or so on various payments, in which case my next column might be about what it's like to sell a kidney.

Speaking of love, this issue of *Pyramid* marks the second official monthly installment of Paul Drye's "Infinite Crossroads" column. If you haven't read it already, check it out!

And, if you're reading this on Friday, you might want to swing by the *Pyramid* chat room to meet and bounce questions off Paul Drye. He'll be talking about the new column, and probably wouldn't mind answering some stuff about his role in **GURPS Traveller Interstellar Wars,** too.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Paranoia Mandatory BONUS FUN Card Game

Published by [Mongoose Publishing](#)

Designed by Steve Gilbert & Gareth Hanrahan

Illustrated by James Holloway

Proofed by Ron Bedison & Sarah Quinnell

Boxed, full-color card game for three to eight players; 150 cards, 154 clone, treason, & wound tokens, & rulebook; $24.95

Mongoose Publishing has released a ***Paranoia*** card game, and with such a property you'd think, "Well, of course." It's even called the ***Mandatory BONUS FUN Card Game.*** Such obvious merchandising opportunities probably weren't lost on the designers of the original game, either, nor their loyal fans, but it never came to pass. Now that it's finally off the ground, the question is whether it was worth the wait.

The object is to be the highest-ranking Troubleshooter when any player loses his sixth clone.

As a primer for those on the outside looking in: The [roleplaying game](#) is about a futuristic society forced to live in a huge complex under the watchful eye of an insane computer determined to protect its charges from "the Commies." Troubleshooters are The Computer's elite cleanup squad, ready to follow orders even unto certain doom to fix what goes wrong. A lot goes wrong, constantly, and conflicting loyalties and schemes among the agents mean the result is usually a bloodbath no one survives. And there are jokes.

The card game throws your team of Troubleshooters at a series of missions, like rooting out traitors and training Vulture squadrons. Some are straightforward, like finding mutants, while others are much more involved (the Internal Security card is mixed with other missions and dealt out to see who survives the purge).

Everyone gets a hand of action cards, and these have at least two different ways they can be used: on the mission, or on each other. Non-traitors will try to fulfill the mission requirements, which typically involved placing a certain number of wound and/or treason tokens on the card. People playing this game, on the other hand, will try to play the cards on their fellow Troubleshooters. Again, this could mean tokens, but it may also reverse the order of play, steal cards, or force someone to lose a turn, among other things. To be fair (which isn't really in keeping with the game), some Troubleshooters will play cards on themselves, since some effects are beneficial (drawing extra cards or performing more actions). Further limits may dictate the security levels you may target.

Clearance levels are based on colors of the spectrum, with everyone but the team leader at Red (the leader is brevetted to Orange). Higher clearances increase your hand size and the number of tokens you can take without dying or being declared a traitor. It's worth noting there are eight Red cards, enough for a full eight players, but increasingly fewer cards for higher levels (they apparently don't expect more than two people to be Ultraviolet at the same time).

Being team leader comes with a few perks, like an additional card for your hand and the ability to abort most missions, but it won't guarantee you a win. Successful missions give survivors a boost to their clearance level, while those who accumulate too many treason tokens during the course of events is executed at debriefing. If you garnered too many wound tokens during the mission, well, that problem is self-correcting . . . move on to clone number two. When

someone loses their last clone, the game ends and the highest clearance level wins (possibly posthumously). Failed missions -- well, suffice to say the result is seldom another promotion.

Fans of the RPG will recognize the deft and talented hand of James Holloway helming the artwork. His malleable characterizations and the fast and loose way he plays with reality continue to be a highlight of the game's appearance and presentation. This is coupled with great component qualities for everything up to and including the box. It could have been half the size and still contained everything, but at least this way there's room for the just-as-inevitable supplements.

The good news is the same as the bad: This game is almost exactly like a session of *Paranoia.* No one's game plan survives contact with the enemy (or your friends, or the hallway outside the briefing room, or . . .), which can be frustrating in a roleplaying game, but in a card game? You may feel like you spent good money on 20 Mission cards you'll never actually finish (as often as not because you lack the cards to succeed and not because teammates are administering a cone rifle probe). Play is fairly quick, but getting a spectacular plan to work without someone gumming the works with a card is tough. The game fields eight players, and that seems about four players too many. Cards get played out of spite, of course, and since missions end when someone runs out their hand, it's doubly and damnably difficult to swing any real progress deliberately.

You're not going to see much more use from the Ultraviolet clearance cards than you are the mission "success" effects, but what you will hear are peals of laughter. The tragicomic effects of all this backstabbing are still present, and it's a giddy thrill to see the same dynamics played out in a different medium. For that, Mongoose is to be commended -- it's one of the best examples of transitioning from one game format to another. But the roleplaying version's real beauty is lost in ***Mandatory BONUS FUN Card Game,*** the less-is-more meaninglessness of the setting. Where the RPG ends with the short-lived pain of ripping off the bandage, this game drags the action out as you wait for someone to lose that last, persistent clone. Without a concentrated effort of the sort seldom seen in a *Paranoia* session, the laughs become strained as the finish wears out its welcome. In similar fashion, it's the sort of game you'll pull out for a change of pace once in a while, but as part of the usual rotation it's just too much of a not-quite-good-enough thing.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Bone Wars: The Game of Ruthless Paleontology

Published by Zygote Games

Designed by Diane A. Kelly & James L. Cambias

Illustrated by Bryant P. Johnson

Four Paleontologist Cards, 33 Dinosaur Bone Cards, 71 Event Cards, & Rules Sheet; $19.95

Bone Wars: The Game of Ruthless Paleontology is the first release from new publisher, Zygote Games, a card game intended to both educate and entertain. Designed for two to four players, it combines three well-trod themes: dinosaurs, history, and science in a game about the Great Dinosaur Bone Rush of the late 19th century. Players take the roles of four genuine bone hunters whose rivalries will see them lie, cheat, steal, and besmirch their opponents, all in order to attain scientific immortality and prove themselves the greatest paleontologist of the age.

The deck is divided into Bone cards, Name cards, Event cards, and finally four Paleontologist cards, one per player. The personalities and histories of all four are detailed on the publisher's website, the cards here giving a name, a Prestige Point track (acquired to win the game), and an individual special ability. Bone cards are divided between skeletal elements and Fossil cards. Skeletal elements come as dinosaur skulls, limbs, and vertebrae, all color coded to different dinosaur families, and used to construct and revise complete skeletons. Fossil cards represent smaller finds, and cannot be revised. Event cards are also divided, into three types. Name cards describe individual dinosaurs, listing each by family, size, when it lived, plus the particulars of its skull, limbs, and vertebrae. Field Crew cards represent team members hired to help you find and excavate bones during a dig, and provide certain permanent abilities, such as gaining extra Bone cards or preventing a rival stealing Bones from you. Actual Event cards provide special actions that can only be used during the phases indicated on the card. Thus, Flash Flood can only be used during the Field Season to force an opponent to discard half of his Bone Cards, while Good Press is a defensive card played to prevent Prestige Point loss during the Controversy phase.

All of the cards are nicely designed to match the game's theme. Apart from the color of the Bone and Name cards, every card comes with a fitting illustration done in brown shades, along with a suitable quote. *Bone Wars* is certainly a good-looking game.

The game is played in turns consisting of three phases, with everyone acting in the same phase, playing one card at a time or passing. Once everyone has played as many cards as possible or has passed, the game moves onto the next phase. The first is Field Season, each player drawing four Bone and four Event cards, and then playing cards to steal bones and interfere in rival expeditions, all trying to acquire as many Bone cards as possible. In the Museum Phase, a player describes a new species or Fossil that he has unearthed. The new skeleton must consist of a Name card and two Bone cards, which can be of any color, but not of the same type.

Last is the Controversy Phase, when a player attempts to either add to, or revise the skeletons in play, either his own, or those of his rivals, done by adding a new Bone card or replacing an existing one. The new Bone card must match the color of the dinosaur's Name card and be a closer match in description to the details on the Name card for that Bone piece. Thus Barnum Brown's Dilophosaurus skeleton, which is blue, currently has a red skull with large nostrils, batteries of grinding teeth, and no front teeth. It can be revised by Barnum or a rival with a blue skull that has carnivore teeth and large eye sockets, because it is closer to the Dilophosaurus' actual description of carnivore teeth, long skull, and bony head crests. At the end of this phase, all unused Bone cards are shuffled back into the Bone deck, while Event cards are retained for the next turn.

To win a player must acquire a quantity of Prestige Points determined by the number of players. They are awarded for playing certain Event cards, for describing new dinosaurs in the Museum phase, and for revising a dinosaur during the Controversy phase. If you revise an opponent's dinosaur, then you gain a Prestige Point, but he loses one.

Designed by both a biologist (Diane A. Kelly) and a game designer (James L. Cambias), **Bone Wars** certainly captures its theme well. A pleasing touch is that winning can be achieved by not only building dinosaurs, but also by decrying the skeletons of others. This is reflected in the Bone cards' dual use -- building and revising. This actually gives a player something to do in the Controversy phase if he lacked the Name cards needed to build in the Museum phase. It also highlights a player's need to grab as many Bone cards as he can, they being the key to scoring.

Unfortunately, **Bone Wars** suffers from one or two problems. The first is the revision of skeletons during the Controversy phase, which requires a new Bone card to match closer the color and information on a Name card. A simple enough process, but the information is too small to read without picking up the intended card and checking it first. This interrupts both play and -- in our games -- the accompanying table talk. Also, in games with more players, fewer Prestige Points are needed to win, and in some games, with the right combination of cards, it is possible to reach this target and win the game on the second turn. The consensus was that the Prestige Point target be revised upwards for longer games. Nor did we think that there were enough Fossil cards, and we also wondered what happened when a skeleton was completed.

Finally, there is the matter of the game's educational aspect. One of my players is a science teacher, and he wondered who **Bone Wars** was aimed at. Certainly, the information on the cards is interesting, but learning from it is another matter. Our best guess was for older children who have enjoyed Steve Jackson Games' **Dino Hunt,** or for the teacher that wanted to impart the rivalries and controversies of the Great Dinosaur Bone Rush to a class.

Despite the slightly inelegant game play and the small rules queries, there is much to like about **Bone Wars.** The design more than matches the theme, with attractive cards, and in particular, Event cards that encourages interaction and a little roleplaying. It is perhaps a little dry, (probably not helped by all that brown), but **Bone Wars: The Game of Ruthless Paleontology** is very much a promising first try for Zygote Games.

--Matthew Pook

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Hite's Handy Field Guide To Space Drives

"In space travel, we can define a 'miracle' as a technology that makes space flight easy."
-- Jon F. Zeigler and James L. Cambias, ***GURPS Space,*** *Fourth Edition.*

With an ominous theremin whir, we perceive the arrival of ***GURPS Space,*** *Fourth Edition.* We can only hope that it comes in peace. However, its approach is heralded not merely by the aforementioned eerie hum, but by a celebratory essay in this very, er, space. Since I already divagated on alternate space travel [campaign frames](#) the last time we had a new edition of ***GURPS Space,*** this time I think I'll poke around the inside of the cowling. What gets us there? Or, rather, what would get us there if we wanted to leave behind not just Earth, but tedious old physical law? I'll leave discussions of real space drives to the real space experts. For now -- to inanity, and beyond!

"Oh, the Dean Machine, the Dean Machine,
You put it right in a submarine,
And it flies so high that it can't be seen --
The wonderful, wonderful Dean Machine!"
-- Damon Knight

Despite having invented inertial location, Norman Dean is probably most famous, in science-fictional circles anyhow, for hoaxing the legendary John W. Campbell with his "Dean Machine," a device that somehow transformed angular momentum into forward motion by means of controlled uneven oscillations. A "Dean Drive," or oscillation thruster, would essentially be a giant flywheel, spinning to build up momentum. Using an unaccountably heretofore overlooked "nonlinear correction" to Newton's Law, the spin could drive a ship without the need for fuel (save for whatever fuel powered the wheel, most likely a mere atomic reactor). Dean began his research in 1946, and obtained a patent in 1959. Campbell illustrated the possibilities of a Dean Drive with a memorable [cover image](#) of a U.S. Navy submarine orbiting Mars. (If that doesn't get your gaming juices going, nothing does.) One Eric Laithwaite (who helped invent the linear induction motor) did Dean one better, demonstrating in 1974 that two flywheels -- a gyroscope, in other words -- created an antigravitational effect. In "How to Build a Flying Saucer," T.B. Pawlicki suggested combining the Dean and Laithwaite devices with a betatron, a kind of electron centrifuge, to focus centrifugal force along a single axis and thus create a whirring, toroidal (and dangerously radioactive -- hence all that scorched grass) saucer-craft suitable for all manner of interplanetary jaunts.

Both Dean and Laithwaite's drives are basically variants of the "overshot" perpetual motion machine, the most famous and enigmatic of which is probably Orffyreus' Wheel. "Orffyreus" is the Latinization of "Orffyre," a ROT13 encryption of the last name of Johann Bessler. Who, for that extra "wow factor," built his potential space drive in 1712! The locals at Gera didn't much care, so he pulled up stakes and moved on until the Markgraf of Hesse-Cassel (whose descendant would be similarly generous to the [Comte de Saint-Germain](#)) gave him rooms in the royal castle at Weissenstein. Here, Orffyreus built a five-foot wheel in 1717. Examined by savants, it was set spinning and sealed up in a tower for three months -- at the end of which time, it was still spinning away. Orffyreus was trying to get the Royal Society to buy his Wheel in 1718, but negotiations went awry when he destroyed it to prevent a snooping Dutchman from discovering its secret. And that was the end of the Hanoverian Space Age.

"Just imagine a machine that is constructed such a way, that it does not operate by steam or electricity, but by those waves that man generates in his tone, in his speech. Just imagine such a motor that one may operate by those waves or perhaps by the generation of his spiritual life. It was still an ideal. Thank God that it was an ideal at that time, because what would have become of this war when this Keely-ideal had become a reality in those days!"
-- Rudolf Steiner, lecture held in Berlin (June 20, 1916)

Former flutist and stage magician John Worrell Keely also used gyroscopes in at least one of his designs, but for him the real secret was acoustical manipulation of the ether. In 1872, he announced his invention of a machine that ran on tuning-fork vibrations, using the sympathetic identity of all particles of the ether. The secret was "quadruple negative harmonics." At various times, he referred to his machine as a "vibratory-generator," or better yet as his "hydro-pneumatic-pulsating-vacu-engine." His vibratory engine, whatever it was called at the time, ran once a "liberator" had

used sound to convert the atoms of air (or water) into etheric force. He refused to show his machines to anyone, or to release industrial versions, which cost him the patronage of, among others, John Jacob Astor. Once Keely perfected his machine, he planned to use it for "aerial navigation," no doubt including trips to Mars. (There exists a tenuous connection between Keely and the enigmatic [Sonora Aero Club](#) -- he reportedly created a "device for lifting heavy weights" for "a gentleman in California.") Keely's notion combined a sort of pre-Einsteinian notion of matter-energy equivalence with Theosophical mysticism, and he was openly accused of sorcery at various times. Madame Blavatsky predicted that Keely's invention would only work for him, describing him as an intuitive adept. As it happens, she was right, in a way. Following Keely's death in 1894 (he was run over by a streetcar), nasty-minded skeptics pried up the floor of his laboratory and discovered fan belts hooking his machines up to compressed air tanks and a silent water wheel.

"They called me deranged. The hope is that they are right! It is of no greater or lesser import for yet another fool to wander this Earth. But if I am right and science is wrong, then may the Lord God have mercy on mankind!"
-- Viktor Schauberger

Speaking of water and odd mysticism, an Austrian forester and amateur hydrologist named Viktor Schauberger became fascinated with water eddying and spiraling around branches in streams. He patented a number of inventions, mostly of the turbine sort, and developed a number of weird manias about water purity and the need for healthful cycles of growth in the soil. He and Hitler met in 1934 to discuss such matters, and although his devotees now claim that he sensed Hitler's doom, he wound up building turbines for Siemens, and then engines for Messerschmitt and Heinkel, during the war. He also spent part of 1941 confined in a mental hospital; perhaps it was here he developed his "Repulsine," which (as far as I can tell, being neither a hydrologist nor a mental patient) used the power of "implosion" to create a self-sustaining vortex from which energy could be drawn. In 1945, the Soviets and Americans both looted his laboratories; Schauberger wound up in the United States sector of Austria. He seemed to concentrate on drawing free energy from his various vortices, rather than on building spaceships or antigravity machines with them, but apparently he produced reams and reams of journals and designs both during the War and after. He died in 1958, five days after returning from a trip to Texas to visit his son Walther. As an interesting coda, the Russian émigré Evgeny Podkletnov claims that his father was part of the Red Army unit that confiscated Schauberger's papers -- and Podkletnov also claims that in 1992 he produced a gravity-reducing screen by means of a rapidly spinning superconductor.

"Mr. Brown claims that a gravitational anomaly exists in the neighborhood of a charged condenser. This effect has not been well documented by Mr. Brown, nor has the writer undertaken to refute it."
-- from the conclusion of the Office of Naval Research report on Townsend T. Brown (ONR File 24-185, Sept. 15, 1952)

Speaking of spinning electrical antigravity things, then, we return to 1917. That year, Professor Francis Nipher, President of the St. Louis Academy of Sciences, demonstrated an equivalence between electromagnetism and gravity, using electrical currents to nullify gravity -- indeed, to create a powerful repulsion force. For whatever reason, Professor Nipher's research fell into obscurity. A few years later in 1921, the physicist Thomas Townsend Brown demonstrated a lifting force created by high-voltage electrical static arcing across capacitors. This effect, later named the Biefeld-Brown Effect, is also called "ion wind" (or electrohydrodynamics) by conventional physicists, but to the right kind of physicists, it's antigravity and reactionless propulsion all in one. During WWII Brown, excitingly, ran the Navy Bureau of Ships' degaussing program -- which is to say, the [Philadelphia Experiment](#) was performed on his watch in 1943. Which, even more excitingly, was the year that Brown had "a nervous breakdown." To cap it all off, in 1956, while working openly on "electro-gravitic propulsion research" for Lockheed, Brown helped found the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP), the grandfather of all civilian UFO study groups. Further, he announced that his effect explained UFO behavior. Which, to be fair, if there *were* UFOs, and if the Biefeld-Brown effect were about a million times stronger, it would.

"The Nazis developed a unique approach to science and engineering quite separate from the rest of the world, because their ideology, unrestrained as it was, supported a whole different way of doing things. . . . The trouble was, when the Americans took it all home with them they found out, too late, that it came infected with a virus. You take the science on, you take on aspects of the ideology, as well."

-- "Dan Marckus," quoted in *The Hunt for Zero Point,* by Nick Cook

In 1952, Brown went back to the Navy and proposed Project Winterhaven, the construction of a saucer-shaped fighter to be propelled by electro-gravitation. The Navy, in a fairly impressive show of disinterest, sent a Pasadena scientist with the Office of Naval Research (ONR) out to evaluate the written records of Brown's experiments, refusing even to fund a demonstration. The ONR report said, basically, that there was no such thing as electro-gravitational propulsion, and if there was, it was just ion wind and couldn't work for flying saucers anyhow. In *The Hunt for Zero Point,* Nick Cook postulates that the reason that the Navy was uninterested in buying an electro-gravitational flying saucer from Brown was that they already had one, the [Flügelrad V-3](#) that they'd captured from the Nazis. By some accounts, the Nazi "Projekt Saucer" had used the Biefeld-Brown Effect; by most accounts, they had used Viktor Schauberger's research into air turbulence to create a version of bronze called Luftschwamm, an improved material coating for the saucer's skin. Cook also postulates that the Nazis had mastered "zero-point energy," which is essentially the energy that quantum physics predicts pervades everything, because absolute zero would be knowable, and therefore can't happen. Or something like that. Actual quantum physics also says you can't reduce an energy state below zero point, by definition. It's all very creepy and uncertain, as quantum physics tends to be -- take care not to draw your flying saucer energy from the Abyss, lest the Abyss draw its energy from you.

"Look, I don't know Bob Lazar. All this sounds fine. I probably met him. I might have said to somebody I met him and I liked him, after I met him, and if I liked him. But I don't remember him . . . I mean you are trying to force questions on me that I simply won't answer."
-- Edward Teller, on Bob Lazar

On the good side, though, zero-point energy provides the other half of the space drive equation. It's all well and good to have your gravity screen or your oscillation thruster or what have you, but you've got to power it somehow. Bob Lazar, however, knows how to kill those two birds with one stone -- provided the stone is made of naturally occurring, supernova-fresh Element 115, that is. Lazar claims to have been recruited by Edward Teller in 1988 to work at Area 51 reverse engineering crashed UFOs for the Air Force. While noodling around with one of the nine crashed saucers, he sussed out the secret to their antigravity and their propulsion, namely Element 115. Under particle bombardment, you see, you can turn Element 115 into even better Element 116. As Element 116 decays, it releases antimatter, which you use to power the ship -- and to power the particle beam, one imagines. (Shades of Orffyreus' Wheel!) The other great thing about Element 115 is that the strong nuclear force around its superheavy nucleus can be amplified into a kind of secondary gravity, or "Gravity B." The aliens use Gravity B to propel their ship -- and, one imagines, to fold space for interstellar travel as well. And thus they travel the stars on their enigmatic missions. And just perhaps -- thanks to the cleverness of Bob Lazar, or to the stolen Viktor Schauberger papers, or to Nazi zero-point energy, or to the acoustic sorcery of John Worrell Keely, or even to the secret of the Orffyreus Wheel discovered by the Comte de Saint-Germain in a Hesse-Kassel tower and brought to America in 1776 -- just perhaps, so do we.

Koshezak and Betenamal

by Paul Drye

Agents have certainties these days. Watch For Centrum. Keep The Secret. The earliest days of parachronic travel were more wide open, with not even a consensus that knowledge of parachronics had to stay in Homeline's hands alone. A lot of events contributed to that last attitude, but one of the things that really hardened it was the freebooters. That's a word that's had to be forgotten twice on Homeline, once in the 19th century and once in the 21st. The first time around it was technologically advanced European and American citizens waging war for their own private ends on entire countries that couldn't resist them -- conquistadors and filibusters. After the middle of the 1800s, though, the practice faded away.

Unfortunately there was a window in the early days of crosstime travel when it was possible again. The modern freebooter was a solo operator, since the transport of private armies would be noticed by even the small and distracted Infinity of the day. On the other hand, they could assault primitives with 21st century technology, and sometimes more if the freebooter had had contact with advanced timelines first. Most of these assaults failed, but there were a few successes that deranged some world or another rather badly. Public opinion swung strongly against the ones that were discovered, and eventually Infinity cracked down on them, thinking that it would cost them more in the long run than what it would take to fund several military campaigns right away. The last and most difficult of these to finish off was Jacob Serik.

The Serik Conspiracy

Equus was a non-descript timeline found on Quantum-6 in 2002. Its divergence point seemed to be the exact sequence of invasions and migrations following the domestication of the horse in the Volga River area around 2200 BC. The precise details are hard to place because this was not a literate area at the time, and Middle Eastern civilization was hit harder by the subsequent chariot-borne warriors. The present day on Equus is 180 AD, and until 25 years ago the Iron Age had only begun about a century before; iron smelting was still restricted to the Fertile Crescent. Most parts of the world were TL 0 or 1, or TL 1+ where things were most advanced.

This, unfortunately, is where Jacob Serik comes into the picture, driving Britain to TL1/2 and even a smattering of TL3 items like horse stirrups. An early agent for Infinity, he had considerable access to people in other timelines in those informal days, and secretly used it for his own ends. Whenever he was assigned to work on newly discovered lines that were divergent after about 1980, or on historical echoes close to Homeline's year, Serik worked to set up a bizarre conspiracy. The allies he recruited were the only people he felt he could trust: his doppelgängers in worlds such as Earth-Beta. After simply looking himself up in the Boston phone book, then knocking on the front door of the listed address, he would convince them to sign on. Most of his "copies" had the same attitudes and quirks as the original Serik, who was in his early forties in 2002, and set psychologically since the 1980s. Six are known to have joined him. Evidence obtained later indicates that he did murder at least two of his other selves because they wouldn't

play along.

In 2003, Serik-1 picked Equus as a suitably primitive and uninteresting timeline for his ultimate plan: the creation of a plaything empire. While recruiting his counterparts he'd been carrying along filched parachronic parts, and now arranged for them and the other Seriks to be jumped to a rendezvous in a late 1990s historical echo. He then translated himself, destroying a hijacked projector facility behind him and leaving very little evidence of his destination. Infinity knew it was sabotage immediately, but it took several weeks for them to figure out where he'd gone. By then Serik had set up shop in an abandoned Birmingham, England warehouse, and jumped once again, sending himself, his doubles, and all the equipment they'd purchased from survivalist and camping shops through to Equus.

Koshezak was the country around the Severn River Gorge on Equus, to the west of where Birmingham was on Homeline. Serik picked the area because of its role in the Industrial Revolution: a place where iron and coal were in close proximity, and a navigable river led down to the sea. Unlike the 18th-century English, however, Serik had a different revolution in mind: the introduction of iron weapons into Bronze Age Europe.

After cowing one large village with modern weaponry (and its effect on the village's petty nobility), the conspiracy leveraged the new manpower into conquering several other settlements. Within six months they controlled an area about 30 miles in diameter centered approximately on the location of Homeline's Telford. Using ruthless terror techniques, the Seriks assembled a bloodthirsty group of about 100 locals who owed everything to them, and used that group to keep the other few thousand down. A warrior/death cult was introduced, complete with brutalizing bonding rituals and facial scarring to make the chosen ones stand out. These "wings" across their cheeks would become the defining symbol of Koshezaki, eventually being imposed on all people living in the core territory from the smallest children on up.

At this point the conquest stalled for a year while the conspiracy introduced iron-working -- specifically, how to make iron spears and armor -- to their new military. Britain, Ireland, and even eventually France along the English Channel experienced a massive convulsion of violence. The Koshezak army doubled and redoubled in size, and were essentially unbeatable with their new weaponry and a few other innovations such as ultralight aircraft reconnaissance.

Infinity finally managed to track down Serik and his cohorts in 2010, at the tail end of a huge push to tie up loose ends after The Secret became the cornerstone of parachronic policy. However, for nearly seven years the half-dozen versions of the Homeline villain took sociopathy to new heights. Little armies were pushed around the British Isles like life-sized wargames with blood. Violence was inflicted on a remarkably large scale for a culture restricted to spears, horses, and sailing ships, and often for no better reason to see the target towns and petty kingdoms squirm. Other times the expeditions were designed to bring back plunder, fuelling a slave-based luxury economy in Koshezak proper, with the Seriks most definitely at the top of a pyramid of bacchanalian consumption. All was not entirely well for them, though, as they began intriguing against each other. When one was assassinated, likely at the instigation of another, it brought the break that Infinity was looking for in their investigation. One of the Seriks -- named Serik-2 so as to specify him from the original and the others -- was captured on Orichalcum, scouting for some piece of Bronze Age tech that would give him the upper hand against the others. Serik-2 soon turned coat on the others, declaring, "If I can't have it, neither can they." He was dumped on Coventry after spilling his guts, and a month later Infinity moved against Koshezak.

Resistance to the crosstime assault was mind-bogglingly fierce for early-Iron-Age warriors fighting back against TL9-equipped soldiers; in their paranoia, the Seriks had planned for the attack since before they left Birmingham. Still, it took only two days for the ground fighting to end, with Koshezak under Infinity's control and some 5,000 dead -- only 61 of which were Infinity agents.

Today, Koshezak is very poor and has a population of perhaps a thousand people -- 10% of what it was before the Seriks came along. Though the main war is over, the area is still highly disrupted, and the tribes and petty chiefdoms in the surrounding area continue to attack one another and jockeying for status as a new equilibrium is worked out. The Serik stronghold was a wooden motte-and-bailey castle, which was burned to the ground by angry natives after Koshezaki power was broken. There are some stone-lined rooms underneath the moldering remains. Investigators can find out about the building and its basements with a minimal amount of research, but there are no maps on file; after

finding what was down there, no one was in a cartographic mood.

Koshezak is closer to a dungeon adventure than one usually encounters in Infinite Worlds. It's quite literally a ruined castle with a catacomb underneath, though the GM should feel free to deemphasize that latter aspect if that's not the campaign's style. Plot McGuffins may be stored in a small set of storage rooms underneath the motte for quick retrieval. On the other hand, the rooms may be enhanced to any level of complexity beyond this, and a conventional "find-the-treasure" adventure presented. Equus is a no-mana line, so challenges will of necessity be non-magical, but there is room to maneuver since the Seriks had conveyor access to many other timelines.

Betenamal

After Infinity's intervention and the collapse of the Seriks' reign of terror over the surrounding lands, the several thousand Koshezaki left alive were threatened with extermination as long as they were anywhere near their former victims. Unfortunately for Infinity, their freedom of action was restricted by a media leak the day after their assault started. Massive public attention focused on Jacob Serik's actions, and while a few back-room suggestions were made that it would be best for The Secret if the Koshezaki died off, it needed to look as if something was being done. Even breaking them up and scattering them around Western Europe wasn't possible because of their distinctive facial scars, which were now a badge of loathing as distinctive as a swastika on Homeline. Eventually Infinity's higher-ups decided to relocate the Koshezaki to the nearest reasonably isolated, uninhabited land near Britain: the Azores.

Most Koshezaki grudgingly accepted the help (though Infinity didn't push anyone, glad to leave as many of them to their fate -- and out of Homeline's hair -- as they could), and a colony of some three thousand were relocated to several pre-fab villages on the central Azorean islands. Once the media's attention moved away from Jacob Serik, Infinity did what they could to forget about them. The result is a number of very poor people, even by early-Iron-Age standards, living in what they call Betenamal ("Land of Exile"). They've started to make a little progress in the last year due to an Infinity Agent named Nayin Jones, outlined below, who has roots in both Homeline and Equus. At her urging the Koshezaki have even started trading with the mainland using as agents their now-teenaged children born since the end of the war -- and so lacking the distinctive scars that would give them away.

The main settlement is about 500 people on the island of Horta, mostly in Mashi, a village on the harbor of Faial. Two smaller towns are on Pico Island, one about four miles across the channel from Mashi on the site of Madalena and another near where Lajes would be on the south coast. The rest of the population is spread around small fishing villages on the other three central Azorean islands. The towns are entirely oriented toward fishing and agriculture, as one of the things that recommended the Azores to Infinity was a near-total lack of other resources that the Koshezaki could use to try and reconquer parts of the mainland. Unfortunately this means things are tending to run down, as metal tools and other items can't be repaired or replaced. Sympathetic people in Infinity have managed to semi-legally filter some iron and trade goods to them, but the Koshezaki are going to return to Stone Age technology within a generation or two if the new attempts at trade with the British Isles and Iberia don't work out.

Betenamal is a place designed to make characters uncomfortable for short periods of time. It's so far off the beaten path that they'll only need to go there when directly investigating something related to the Serik Conspiracy. Mashi and the other settlements are like the worst stereotypes of Indian reservations: poor and despairing, steeped in alcoholism (the Seriks have to answer for this last problem too: they introduced distillation to Equus so they wouldn't have to go to another timeline for something stronger than beer). The people themselves are quite unpleasant also, resentful of their treatment at the hands of out-timers, and often with mass murder in their past. The younger generation is less damaged, definitely delinquents who've been raised in a toxic psychological environment but at least with the potential to get better. The older Koshezaki are hopeless cases, but a GM could use the younger ones for a twisted take on the *Dangerous Minds* bad-kids-made-good genre.

People

Nayin Jones

The one person who cares the most about the Koshezaki is an I-Cop in the Justice Division. Her area of expertise is agents looking to score big by putting unsanctioned pressure on natives of primitive timelines. With that background, it's not too surprising that Nayin Jones would be interested in the Serik Conspiracy, but there's more to it than that.

Her adoptive father was William Jones, a British agent for Infinity at the time of the invasion of Koshezak, and one who suffered injuries during the assault that saw him cashiered and retired. However, he was injured in the course of trying to protect a four-year-old girl whose parents he'd just had to kill to save his own life. After being turned into a casualty his father's unit mates returned the girl to Homeline as a way of finishing what he'd been trying to do before he was shot through the chest. In 2027, Infinity would've arranged to have the little refugee put up for adoption, even assuming the unit had gone against the modern policy to avoid bringing back strays. Without such rules in the early days of crosstime travel, Jones informally took the child as his daughter after being discharged from hospital. He raised her until the age of 18, when he finally died from long-term complications of his injuries. Nayin joined the Infinity Corps a few months before he passed away. She's been a field agent for the last year.

Nayin's life is shaped by three things: being the sole Koshezaki who lives on Homeline, having to watch the slow fading of her adoptive father in the aftermath of his injury, and the facial scars she bears that mark her out as different on Homeline, and an object of hate on Equus. She's a profoundly lonely person, who garners some sympathy from others who learn her story but blows it away through her abrasiveness. She would be a lot happier if she could put the past to rest; unfortunately she feels she can't. The only thing that keeps her together is her quest to bring some measure of a proper life to the people of Betenamal, some of whom are probably her relatives. In other matters she's a typically conscientious I-Cop; when it comes to Betenamal, she indulges in regulation bending for their benefit.

She is European, with black hair, blue eyes, and darker skin than is usual for a native of Britain. She is fit, but otherwise of average height and weight. Her most distinctive feature is two triangular scars across her cheekbones, each about three inches across and an inch high at their thickest. They were rubbed with coal dust when they were inflicted and so are an obvious blue-black against her skin.

Nayin Jones   *150 points*

Age 22; Human; 5'6"; 130 lbs.

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 13 [10]; Per 11 [0]; FP 14 [9].
Basic Speed 6 [5]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 10; Parry 10 (Karate).

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].
CF: Homeline (Native) [0].
Languages: Centrum English (Accented/None) [1]; French (Native) [4]; Homeline English (Native) [0]; Koshezaki (Accented) [2]; Spanish (Accented/None) [1].

Advantages

Combat Reflexes [15]; Fit [5]; Language Talent [10]; Legal Enforcement Powers 2 [10]; Patrol Rank 1 [5].

Disadvantages

Bad Temper (12 or less) [-10]; Code of Honor (Infinity Patrol) [-5]; Duty (Patrol) (15 or less (almost always)) [-15]; Impulsiveness (9 or less) [-15]; Sense of Duty (Koshezaki of Betenamal) (Large Group) [-10]; Sense of Duty (Patrol) (Small Group) [-5]; Stubbornness [-5]; Unnatural Feature (Facial Scars) -1 [-1]. Quirks: Closes her eyes for a few seconds when shocked; Gets upset when children are in danger; Glares at people; Self-Righteous [-4].

Skills

Electronics Operation/TL8 (Parachronic)-12 (IQ+1) [4]; First Aid/TL8 (Human)-14 (IQ+3) [8]; Guns/TL8 (Pistol)-13 (DX+1) [2]; History (British Isles)-13 (IQ+2) [12]; Karate-12 (DX+0) [4]; Riding (Horse)-12 (DX+0) [2]; Shortsword-13 (DX+1) [4]; Soldier/TL8-12 (IQ+1) [4]; Sports (Rugby)-11 (DX-1) [1]; Stealth-12 (DX+0) [2]; Survival (Woodlands)-14 (Per+3) [12]; Teaching-13 (IQ+2) [8].

Jacob Serik

There are still instances of Jacob Serik floating around; Serik-2 on Coventry to be sure, and others on their native timelines who had nothing to do with the conspiracy. Agents could encounter them at any time, as well as possible escapees from the assault on Koshezak nearly two decades ago. The stats below are for Serik-2. Serik-1 would be a little older (68 as opposed to 64), and any other Seriks in on the conspiracy would be over 60 by now. All are similar to one another, though there is room to twist Serik-2's skills and abilities in a variety of ways.

Serik-2 has a history similar to most of the others. He was born in Boston in 1959, and was in the US Army during the early 1980s. After mustering out he worked as a police officer in Massachusetts -- Serik-1 was recruited to Infinity from the Malden Police Department in 1999. Apart from the skills implied by that backstory, the Seriks are mostly shaped by their common psyche: high-functioning sociopaths, very bright, with a fascination for swashbuckling adventure stories like *A Princess of Mars* and *Lest Darkness Fall.* Serik-2 no longer has an outlet for his peculiar passions, but he does still enjoy teasing his fellow covenanters with disgusting stories of what he could do when he was in absolute power. He certainly would like to get back to "the good old days," but is currently resigned to the idea that that will never happen.

He is a tall, thin man of European descent, with light gray hair that is cut short and now very thin. He wears a grey moustache. His eyes are watery blue.

Jacob Serik   *155 points*

Human; 6'2"; 170lbs

ST 10 [0]; *DX* 11 [20]; *IQ* 14 [80]; *HT* 10 [0].
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 14 [0]; Per 15 [5]; FP 10 [0].
Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 9; Parry 10 (Brawling).

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].
CF: Western (Native) [0].
Languages: Centrum English (Broken) [2]; English (Native) [0].

Advantages

Charisma 1 [5]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Cultural Adaptability [10]; Fearlessness 1 [2]; Hard to Subdue 1 [2]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Photographic Memory [10].

Disadvantages

Compulsive Lying (12 or less) [-15]; Overconfidence (12 or less) [-5]; Sadism (12 or less) [-15]; Social Stigma (Criminal Record) [-5]. Quirks: Enjoys the smell of blood; Likes stories about battles; Proud [-3].

Skills

Administration-13 (IQ-1) [1]; Architecture/TL2-13 (IQ-1) [1]; Area Knowledge (British Isles)-14 (IQ+0) [1]; Brawling-13 (DX+2) [4]; Computer Operation/TL8-14 (IQ+0) [1]; Criminology/TL8-14 (IQ+0) [2]; Electronics Operation/TL8 (Communications)-13 (IQ-1) [1]; Electronics Operation/TL8 (Sensors)-13 (IQ-1) [1]; Fast-Draw (Pistol)-12 (DX+1) [1]; First Aid/TL2 (Human)-14 (IQ+0) [1]; Guns/TL8 (Pistol)-12 (DX+1) [2]; Law (United States)-14 (IQ+0) [4]; Observation-15 (Per+0) [2]; Research/TL8-13 (IQ-1) [1]; Riding (Horse)-12 (DX+1) [4]; Search-15 (Per+0) [2]; Shadowing-14 (IQ+0) [2]; Shortsword-10 (DX-1) [1]; Soldier/TL8-13 (IQ-1) [1]; Stealth-11 (DX+0) [2]; Survival (Woodlands)-14 (Per-1) [1]; Tactics-12 (IQ-2) [1].

Adventure Seeds

- There is at least one Jacob Serik still alive and well, though stuck on Coventry. If he disappears, all hell will break loose, 20-year-old history or not. He's still a well-known name among Homeline's general public, and definitely a symbol for the abuses rooted out in the years leading up to 2010. The only question is, who has something to gain from it? Serik-1 was presumed dead in the assault on Koshezak, but who can be sure when several genetically identical copies of him were floating around? Would he even try to spring one of his counterparts after all this time, especially after the infighting of the Empire's last few years? Or is this all the start of some obscure power play within Infinity itself? Someone might be using him as a source of information about how to conquer a primitive timeline, possibly without his consent.
- Over 10 years, the Koshezaki brought enormous amounts of plunder back to the Serik stronghold. Common belief is that is was scattered to the winds after the conspiracy was brought to an end, but there are persistent rumors that some or all of it is still cached in the area. After all, while Koshezak was only 30 miles across, that's still more than 700 square miles of land to search, about the size of Luxembourg. However, any hint of a treasure hoard will bring in Nayin Jones, who will want to use it to better the lives of the Koshezaki in Betenamal. She knows they don't have much right to it, having stolen it themselves, but she'll harden herself against caring and put any legal and extra-legal pressure she can on the finders.
- Preferably some time after encountering Nayin Jones in another context, the adventurers have just begun a seemingly unrelated operation when they are called back to Homeline. The projector site through which they passed en route to their current timeline has been destroyed in a way reminiscent of Serik-1's break from Infinity back in 2003. The connection is made far more ominous by a corpse left behind, which bears the distinctive scars of a Koshezaki. Everyone is now under suspicion, including the adventurers. Jones will contact them, a suspect herself and ignoring a directive to avoid muddying the case. She's learned that in order to avoid a public relations disaster she and they are going to be thrown to the media in order to buy time for the real perpetrators to be found -- not that Infinity is sure the PCs *aren't* involved anyway. It is up to the GM to decide if Jones herself is innocent, or if her year of marginal illegalities on behalf of the surviving Koshezaki haven't finally led to some grand criminal scheme of her own.

Using Koshezak in Other Settings

Equus is already a fantasy setting, albeit an unusual one. Typical fantasy campaigns revolve around great events; in this world, those great events happened 20 years ago. The Koshezak War was in their parents' time, and the adventurers are instead living with the turmoil-ridden aftermath. What's it like to be an ambitious warrior or wizard one generation after the Time of Big Damn Heroes? For a particularly odd set of adventures, the player characters could all be the sons and daughters of the Koshezaki, the first ones who can return to the world incognito. Can they make their own lives, or are they considered the Children of Great Evil no matter what they do?

Given the number of science fiction authors who are also fans of Rudyard Kipling, the Koshezaki variety of "The Man Who Would Be King" fits into a long line of high-tech filibusters. Most SF game settings have some laws that can be used to isolate primitive worlds from conquerors, but few of them explore what happens when those laws are inevitably broken. The sad history of Koshezak -- and its shabby follow-up treatment by the organization whose rogue

agent caused the trouble -- can fill in for this absence of details.

A Decidedly Different Elf

for *d20 System*

by Caias Ward

Valnor Stormaxe swung with more caution at the elf; he barely connected with his blow, exposing a thin trace of blood from otherwise flawless blue skin. Mallifor pressed his own attack, several bolts of energy streaking from his hands and slamming into the elegantly dressed elf. The elf staggered back, reaching for its own spell components.

Valnor pressed his attack, shrugging off his shield and gripping his ax with both hands. He stepped forward as the elf stepped back, closing the distance with his waraxe blade. It bit deeply into the elf's chest, cracking bone as he pulled it free. Mallifor gestured again for good measure, several bolts of energy striking the elf. The elf stumbled, about to fall . . .

And laughed. The elf straightened up, exposing its slashed torso. Valnor recoiled in horror as the flesh knitted itself shut and the blood crawled back into its body. Mallifor did not give up his attack, his incantation blasting the elf with several fiery rays; the elf ignored them except for a disappointed look upon its face and a clucking sound from its mouth. It smiled, showing beautiful and savage teeth.

"I'm bored with this, human," the elf drawled at Mallifor, its voice at once menacing and disinterested. "My turn."

Mallifor recognized the gestures as that of a fireball, but his last living thoughts on the matter were the numbing cold that exploded around him and the snickering of this unnatural elf . . .

* * *

The word "elf" conjures up a particular image that is very familiar to many *d20 System* players. For the most part, elves are forest dwellers, long-lived and skilled in magic and swordplay. While distant at times, their race has a tendency towards good and have long racial hatreds for many evil races. They value freedom and the rights of others; humans and other shorter-lived races often consider them "otherworldly." Still, when they are compared to other player character races, the oddities and allure of elves sometimes fade. The "common" elf presents no more mystery than a human or goblin.

But what if the common elf was an offshoot of a much more ancient race? What if the high elves, dark elves, and wild elves all had a common progenitor, one lost even from the memories of elves and for good reason?

Kolen-Jhan

Medium Outsider (Cold, Elf, Extraplanar)

Hit Dice: 7d8+14 (45 hp)
Initiative: +7
Speed: 50 ft. (10 squares)
Armor Class: 20 (+3 Dex, +7 natural), touch 13, flat-footed 17
Base Attack/Grapple: +7/+8
Attack: +1 Cold Iron Rapier +11 melee (1d6+1) or +1 Composite Longbow +11 (1d8+1)
Full Attack: +1 Cold Iron Rapier +11/+6 melee (1d6+1) or +1 Composite Longbow +11/+6 (1d8+1)
Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks: Spells
Special Qualities: Damage reduction 10/cold iron, darkvision 60 ft, elf qualities, cold affinity, fast healing 3,

resistance to acid 10 and electricity 10, spell resistance 18
Saves: Fort +7, Ref +8, Will +6
Abilities: Str 12, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 17, Wis 13, Cha 13
Skills: Bluff +11, Concentration +15, Diplomacy +15, Disguise +11, Hide +8, Knowledge (arcana) +13, Knowledge (the planes) +13, Move Silently +8, Sense Motive +11, Spellcraft +15, and Spot +14
Feats: Improved Initiative, Skill Focus: Concentration, Weapon Finesse
Environment: Any (cold mountains or cold evil-aligned plane preferred)
Organization: Solitary, Troupe (2-5 Kolen-jhan and equal to three times number of humanoid servants), or Household (10-30 Kolen-jhan, five to ten times number of humanoid servants, and two to three times number of frost giants)
Challenge Rating: 10
Treasure: Standard coins; triple goods; double items
Alignment: Always lawful evil
Advancement: By character class
Level Adjustment: +5

Kolen-jhan appear at first glance to be like any other elves. More than a moment's glance, however, reveals several startling differences. First, Kolen-jhan's eyes are solid black, large and luminous, with occasional slashes of ice blue through them from moment to moment. Secondly, their hair and skin are decidedly unnatural, both ranging in color from a dusky white to pale blue.

Kolen-jhan average a little less than five feet tall, with a slight build. They dress in finery of all kinds, to the point of decadence, and adorn themselves with jewelry of gold and silver. A Kolen-jhan is never seen without a weapon of cold iron, and such weapons are often enchanted to inflict the most suffering on their targets.

Kolen-jhan speak Common, Draconic, Elven, Giant, Goblin and their own language, a twisted form of Elven that may be understood by speakers of Elven that make a DC 10 Int check. Check once for each bit of information.

Combat

Kolen-jhan attempt to avoid melee combat with those they consider "lessers," saving melee for friendly or not-so-friendly duels with their own kind. Decidedly cruel, they will seek to eliminate opponents in a painful and efficient manner as its abilities dictate. Kolen-jhan have a particular disdain of divine casters, targeting clerics and other divine casters with their most powerful and violent spells. Normally, they will command their minions (alternately humans or hobgoblins, or frost giants) to melee with opponents while they use spells in battle.

Spells: Kolen-jhan cast spells as a 7th-level wizard. They may choose to specialize in a particular school of magic, often doing so in the Enchantment and Necromancy schools.

Typical Wizard Spells Memorized (4/6/5/4/2; save DC 13 + spell level, specialized in Necromancy, Illusion and Enchantment Prohibited):

0—detect magic, light, mage hand, message, read magic, resistance, touch of fatigue; 1st— mage armor, magic missile x2, ray of enfeeblement x2, shield; 2nd—blindness x2, resist energy, scorching ray x2; 3rd—fireball (cold), fly, haste, vampiric touch;4th—enervation, polymorph

More powerful Kolen-jhan sometimes multiclass as clerics of the Master of Chains (see sidebar) to eventually become Mystic Theurges, as rogues to become Arcane Tricksters, or become Eldritch Knights. Many Kolen-jhan become wizards and enter wizard prestige classes.

Kolen-Jhan As Characters

Kolen-jhan characters possess the following racial traits.

- +2 Strength, +6 Dexterity, +4 Constitution, +6 Intelligence, +2 Wisdom, +2 Charisma.
- Medium size.
- A Kolen-jhan's base land speed is 50 feet.
- Darkvision out to 60 feet.
- Racial Hit Dice: A Kolen-jhan begins with seven levels of Outsider, which provide 7d8 Hit Dice, a base attack bonus of +7, and base saving throw bonuses of Fort +5, Ref +5, and Will +5.
- Racial Skills: A Kolen-jhan's outsider levels give it skill points equal to 10 x (8 + Int modifier). Its class skills are Bluff, Concentration, Diplomacy, Knowledge (Arcana), Knowledge (the planes), Perform, Sense Motive, Spellcraft, and Spot.
- Racial Feats: A Kolen-jhan's outsider levels give it three feats.
- Immunity to sleep spells and effects, and a +2 racial saving throw bonus against enchantment spells or effects.
- Low-light vision.
- Weapon Proficiency: Kolen-jhan are automatically proficient with all simple and martial weapons.
- +2 racial bonus on Listen, Search, and Spot checks. A Kolen-jhan who merely passes within 5 feet of a secret or concealed door is entitled to a Search check to notice it as if he were actively looking for it.
- Cold Affinity: a Kolen-jhan may choose to memorize any fire-based spell it can cast to instead do cold damage. It may only do this with spells that are memorized.
- +7 natural armor bonus.
- Spells: A Kolen-jhan character casts spells as a 7th-level wizard. If the character takes additional levels of sorcerer, these levels stack with the wizard's base spellcasting ability for spells known, spells per day, and other effects dependent on caster level. A wizard character likewise uses the sum of its racial spellcasting levels and class levels to determine the abilities of its familiar.
- Special Qualities (see above): damage reduction 10/Cold Iron, Immune to Cold, Vulnerability to Fire, Fast Healing 3, Spell Resistance equal to 18 + class levels, Resistance to Acid 10, Electricity 10
- Automatic Languages: Common, Draconic, Elven, Giant, Goblin, and Kolen-jhan. Bonus Languages: Infernal, Abyssal, Aquan
- Favored Class: Wizard
- Level adjustment +5.

Kolen-Jhan Culture

Kolen-jhan culture is a military republic, based around the strength of a particular Kolen-jhan and the household he creates for himself. Often, households are made of unrelated Kolen-jhan, simply gathered together for mutual protection, with a agreed-upon househead (Vhansuth) that handles internal affairs. There is far less infighting than would normally occur for such an evil race due to a complex series of laws established for the society that regulate assassinations, dueling, the redress of grievances, and other matters. Many problems are handled in gladiatorial combat or formal household military actions and war games against another, rather than the treachery associated with dark elves or the freewheeling chaos of humanoid cultures.

When a matter extends beyond the interests of a single household (such as defense of a city, conquest of outlying regions, or conflict between houses), the interested households send representatives (Tavyn-mhen) to gather and discuss the issue. Depending on the issue, voting may require a set number of supporting Tavyn-mhen votes (financial dispute between two or more households) or a unanimous decision (setting of terms for inter-house military action). Clerics of the Master of Chains act as judges and interpreters of the law, but do not hold the great power that they might in a theocracy.

In many respects, Kolen-jhan society is meritocracy, where the worth of a household is determined by what it brings to the community. Be it military

The Master of Chains

The Kolen-jhan have forsaken the elven pantheons, worshipping their own twisted and perverse god, the Master of Chains. He is the god of slavery, subjugation, and conquest, only concerned with his mastery of others, befitting his Lawful Evil alignment. His clerics are cruel paragons of the Kolen-jhan race, a civilized veneer over a core of depravity and violence. Often, they are the trendsetters of Kolen-jhan culture, keeping a fine balance in Kolen-jhan cities and nations between decadence and collapse. When out among the

might, arcane research, divine power, or civic improvement, the Kolen-jhan reward those that advance the community and severely punish those that would bring it down. Granted, much of what is done is done in the name of self-interest, and it is a fine line between bettering the society and assuring benefits for themselves and their household.

Slavery is a common element of Kolen-jhan society. While slaves are treated firmly (some would say cruelly), the ambitious among them find ways to secure their freedom, often by set periods of service in the military or exceptional skills in arts, sciences, or magic. It is in the military that a slave can truly shine, should he survive his enlistment. Despite the rules of ownership, any slave has the right to request military service in his household; if this is denied, he can request to be placed in another household's military, where law requires he be sold to the highest bidder. It is the one check to intolerable cruelty on the part of the Kolen-jhan that a slave may escape to another household if he is willing to risk a military life denied to him by his own master.

As befits a decadent culture, arts have a solid place in Kolen-jhan society. Much of their work is disturbing to other races, portraying great violent and profane acts, yet holding a terrible beauty. Despite the nature of the work, the artisans of the Kolen-jhan are no less skilled than masters of other races. They focus on sculpture, architecture, painting in flesh and blood, and weapon and armor smithing. In climates that allow it, sculpture and architecture are done with ice, magically hardened and sometimes used to imprison still-living enemies in frozen tableaux.

world, they are the masterminds of slavery rings and cults dedicated to excess.

The holy symbol of the Master of Chains is six interlocking chain links of cold iron; these are worn against the skin by the Kolen-jhan cleric, leaving a permanent burn scar against the skin. The Master of Chains domains are Destruction, Evil, Knowledge, Law, Trickery, and War. His favored weapon is the spiked chain.

Feel free to add or substitute domains involving suffering, slavery, or the domination of others.

Introducing the Kolen-jhan

The Kolen-jhan can have a variety of introductions into your game:

- Through magic such as Hats of Disguise and Rings of Mind Shielding, the Kolen-jhan have kept themselves hidden in elven society until recently. A sudden swing in behavior will cause immediate conflict, so the Kolen-jhan will slowly work mistrust and deception into a community.
- As an extraplanar race, members of the Kolen-jhan may have only recently returned to the Prime Material Plane. They will immediately go to work recruiting allies for whatever cause they have at the moment, which many times involves the control of whole continents.
- The souls of the Kolen-jhan have been dormant for countless generations, driven down by the weakening of magic in the world. Recently, an unforeseen growth of magic has awakened the bloodline, causing some elves to transform into Kolen-jhan and resume their old ways. The new Kolen-jhan will be quite happy with their transformation; their friends and allies may not be as happy, however.
- Whole cities of Kolen-jhan are located in unexplored mountain ranges or even have an empire across an unknown continent. Keeping to themselves, they trade through intermediaries, but continued unwanted contact has "inspired" them to expand their holdings at the expense of others.

Appendix Z: Traffickomancy

A New Path for Ritual Magic in *GURPS*

by Eric Funk

"Luxor, nexor, burst and BURN!"
"What is she doing?"
"Just a curse, dearie. Have a nice day. "
--Grandma Addams and Debbie Jellinsky, *Addams Family Values*

How many people follow this motto? "If another driver cuts you off, curse them!" Few take it literally, but beware those that do! What is one to do when stuck in gridlock or by a long train? It gives one time to burn . . . candles? Ever wonder why cars break down when you are going somewhere important, but not just around the block? Why do people have voodoo heads; fuzzy dice; icons of the Virgin Mary; or Saint Christopher, the Patron Saint of Travelers? They are foci for rituals!

Cars can be integral to the lives and livelihood of many people. While most citizens understand the basic principles of how a car works, few care to know how to maintain a car other than to fill the gas tank when it gets near "E" and to bring the car in for a checkup when the "oil" light comes on. It's like magic, one might say.

"In fact, very few people [. . .] know that the very shape of the M25 [highway] forms the sign odegra [. . .]. The thousands of motorists [are] grinding out a low-grade evil to pollute the metaphysical atmosphere for scores of miles around.
"It had earned him a commendation."
--Terry Pratchett, *Good Omens*

Technology is slow to enter the world of ritual magic, but as more adepts that grew up with it begin to survive beyond the "adventuring" age, they find time to research new rituals. Generic charms (see p. SPI92) and charms enchanted specifically for the vehicle can be attached to the rear-view mirror, or on the hood. From there, it will protect the vehicle, which usually means that any harm intended for the passengers will usually have to affect it first.

Unless they are a bus or a semi, most civilian ground vehicles are compact enough that they will be within a "five-yard radius"(see p. SPI91). The lack of space for large numbers of participants is offset by the tactical mobility of the site. Even a portable Sanctity 0 vehicle saves an adept seven hours of preparation over the span of a week (see p. SPI87).

Other options include enchant the vehicle with Chaperone to protect it from a mishap or curse. Another ritual to use if traffic is backed up is to use the Ritual of Obscurity and drive (slowly) on the sidewalk? This would prevent active detection by bystanders, and they instinctively avoid you. (See also the Loa Legba, deity of Crossroads, p. VO87.)

"And above all, watch with glittering eyes the whole world around you because the greatest secrets are always hidden in the most unlikely places. Those who don't believe in magic will never find it."
--*Roald Dahl*

Example Vehicle 1: Vintage Horse-drawn Carriage

This pristine, simple cab looks like a perfect reconstruction of the earliest carriages. Changing hands throughout the centuries, this vehicle has traveled across Europe, and can be found anywhere the campaign is held, even in the Americas. Its size allows for most two to four person rituals and permits one to park nearby and reduce range penalties.

Ritual Modifiers: Sanctity +4

Example Vehicle 2: "Old Yellow": 1940s Cab

This mobile antique is still in perfect condition. The engine still purrs, it never seems to need an oil change, and the seats are still in perfect condition (albeit with and off plaid pattern). Passengers may notice the presence of odd scented air fresheners and a small variety of dashboard ornaments, but there is nothing out of the ordinary to the untrained eye.

Ritual Modifiers: Sanctity +2

Example Vehicle 3: "Peace Wagon": 1960s van

This van was originally decorated in the style of "technicolor kaleidoscope" paint job with large Peace stickers and bumper stickers. Their outlines are still visible upon a close inspection of its dark matte paint job. It appears to have rusty joints and a poor-sounding engine, but it actually runs flawlessly. It can support rituals of up to eight or 10 people in the back, and the vehicle sports air conditioning. The interior radiates an aura of goodwill. At the GM's option, rituals performed within that harm the subject are at -1, and those that help, +1.

Ritual Modifiers: Sanctity +1

What effects did they decades of touring have on [Furthur](#)?

"I like traffic lights, but only when they're green."
-- Monty Python, *I Like Traffic Lights*

Path of Travel

Traffic Flow -- Defaults to Path of Travel-1 or Path of Luck-3

This ritual is designed to help long-distance driving and getaways. It can only be cast with a minimum duration of 30 minutes. The ritual creates a pool of points that the subject can use before the duration runs out.

The caster only knows if there are points remaining, but not how many.

The subject can "Spend" points of success as bonuses to long-distance driving rolls and Area knowledge rolls while in a vehicle for at least 30min (Max +5 at a time to a roll). The GM must make these rolls as spell failure when creating this "pool" results in negative points applying instead of positive ones. These bonuses help one to "coincidentally" have all automatic intersections and systems help one along, but not humans (such as a parade, funeral procession or motorcade).

Creative uses can also include speeding up library research and internet searching. This can only work when real and virtual travel (such as many websites or large libraries) or multiple rolls are required, and takes a minimum of one hour to complete.

Enhances Senses/Piercing Obscurity -- Defaults to Path of Travel-2 or Path of Knowledge-2

It cancels environment penalties to the senses equal to the Degree of Success (minimum 1, maximum modifier of +9). This can be applied to mechanical senses, such as microphones and cameras.

There is rumored to be a variant that cancels penalties to driving skills . . .

(Except for specialist (Travel) rituals, all defaults listen in GURPS Spirits are still available.)

From Path of Health

Dose (Inanimate): Defaults to Dose-2, Path of Travel-1 or Path of Health-5; counts as maintenance, a Critical Success or Success by 10+ recovers lost HT

Succor (Inanimate): Defaults to Succor-2, Path of Travel-5 or Path of Health-8; recovers 1 lost HP per roll

Malice (Inanimate): Defaults to Malice-1, Path of Travel-5 or Path of Health-8; resists with HT

Evil Eye (Inanimate): Defaults to Evil Eye-1, Path of Travel-7 or Path of Health-10; resists with HT instead of Will

From Path of Nature

Hasten Mount (Travel): Defaults to Hasten Mount-1, Path of Travel-4, Path of Health-7, or Path of Nature-6 : Increases vehicle speed by +10% instead of +1 Move.

From Path of Luck

Gremlins: Defaults to Path of Travel-2

Loyal Item: Defaults to Path of Travel-5

Here are some other rituals recommended by the adepts of the Path of Travelers:

Primary

Path of Cunning: Obscurity
Path of Luck: Chaperone
Path of Protection: Curse Sanctum, Ward

Suggested

Path of Cunning: Hallucination, Scry
Path of Protection: Ghost Shield

"Black magic operates most effectively in preconscious, marginal areas. Casual curses are the most effective."
--*William S. Burroughs*

Other Resources

Pyramid Links

- "The School of Tobaccomancy" by Brian Rogers
- "The Garage" by Kenneth Peters (*Vehicles Lite* samples)
- "The Cheese College" by Andrew Hartsock
- "Gustomancy and Conspiromancy" by Dylan Craig
- "Suppressed Transmission: Route 66" Parts 1, 2, and 3, by Kenneth Hite

Other Links

- *GURPS* Holistic Computing: "How to deal with Machine Spirits"
- The "Furthur" bus -- http://www.dead.net/cavenweb/furthur/furthurpast.html
- More "Furthur" -- http://www.fact-index.com/f/fu/furthur.html

Jane Richards, Ski Bunny

for *GURPS*

by Mark Gellis

Jane Richards was six years old the first time she went skiing.

Her parents loved skiing. They had met on the slopes as teenagers and married when Jane's mother completed her nursing degree and got a job at a hospital in Denver. Jane's father was originally from Idaho but he did not care very much where he lived as long as he was with the woman he loved and close to the mountains. Never an ambitious man, he had finished a degree in chemistry the same year his wife had started her career as a nurse and spent the next 30 years teaching at a local high school. He is completely satisfied with his life.

As soon as her parents thought she was old enough, they took their little girl to the mountains, strapped a pair of skis on her, and let her see for herself what it felt like to fly.

Jane grew up loving the mountains, and loved to ski. She was good at it, too. She was not quite good enough to make the Olympic team (although she tried), but she knew that whatever she did, she knew she wanted it to involve the mountains and the snow. As a teenager, she taught friends the finer points of skiing, and she spent many summers riding and hiking in the mountains. When she went to college, she studied Geology, but decided against working in a lab or with some government agency and instead got a job with a local resort as a ski instructor. She works in the off season as a wilderness guide. One of her most interesting jobs was working at a ski resort in Austria for a year; Jane loved living in Europe but eventually came back to the United States because she did not like being so far from her family. She can still speak German fairly well and is impressed by Americans who know more than one language.

Throughout the years, she has made a point to keep her skills sharp and learn anything she can that will help make her more effective at what she does. She can hunt, ride, cook, treat common injuries, and handle basic engine repair and home wiring, and she knows how to survive virtually any natural hazard from blizzards to avalanches.

If Jane has a weakness, it is that she hates to back down from a challenge, and she is willing to take risks. In fact, she *likes* it; it is an incredible rush to pull off some stunt she knows other people would be afraid to try. She usually gets away with it, too. Whatever gods watch over the Colorado Rockies, they seem to like this gal.

At the same time, Jane will not take risks with anyone else. In fact, when she is teaching or guiding anyone, she feels a personal commitment to keep them safe. If someone gets injured on the slopes, she stays with them until help arrives and she is certain they are going to be all right. And if someone she is guiding somehow gets lost in the wilderness (getting caught in an avalanche, etc.), she will keep looking for them until she is sure they have been found or until she is convinced they can no longer be alive.

People like Jane. She is smart and confident, and will take charge if she needs to, but works hard to avoid making someone feel stupid just because they do not know as much as she does. She sees herself as a teacher, like her Dad. The only difference is that she has a very big classroom.

Men especially like Jane. She is a very attractive woman. Most figure out very quickly, however, that she has little patience with men who simply see her as a possible conquest. She cannot respect anyone whom she thinks is trying to figure out what she looks like under a parka when they should be paying attention to what she is telling them about enjoying the slopes or hiking through the mountains without getting hurt.

She lives alone in a small, neatly kept house a few miles from the resort. She does not expect to share it with anyone in the near future. The only time Jane Richards gave her heart to someone, it got broken. Bill Finney was perfect for her. A fellow ski enthusiast, he worked as an automobile mechanic at a local garage and he was also an avid reader.

Handsome, funny, and good with his hands, he made Jane feel safe, made her feel like she had found someone with whom she could grow old.

In fact, Bill was very fond of her, but he was still in love with his former girlfriend, Debbie Johnson, who had left him when she started having an affair with a local hotel manager. It was not long, however, before Debbie realized that the hotel manager was not going to leave his wife, and she also realized that she hated the idea of anyone else having Bill. She reconciled with Bill and, a year later, Bill married her.

In a small resort town, Jane will sometimes see Bill on the slopes, or when she needs some work done on her car, and both of them find it awkward. Bill is very much in love with his wife, who has realized how lucky she is to have someone like Bill, but he likes Jane and he feels guilty about having hurt her.

Jane's parents, now in their 50s, live in a suburb of Denver, about a two-hour drive from the town where Jane lives. Jane has one brother, Michael, three years younger than herself. He is a sergeant in the United States Army.

Using Jane Richards in a Campaign

Jane is designed to be used in any modern campaign where the player characters are dealing with mountains or serious cold. She is the kind of NPC who can provide the technical and survival skills they might be lacking for a mountain adventure. In addition, she knows the area, and also knows a bit about whatever town serves as a home base during the adventure. Thus, a GM can use Jane in a variety of roles.

There are lot of things one can do in the mountains. Because they are isolated, sparsely populated, and because the terrain is both rough and treacherous, they make excellent settings for adventures. Even before PCs confront their adversaries, they will have to survive nature itself. And if something goes wrong, the heroes may find themselves in an environment where they are on their own and far from help.

Monsters love mountains. Because they are sparsely populated (and, often, some of the people who live there are eccentric enough to either leave them alone even if they know what they are or serve as their minions), discovery by those who might harm them is less likely, and the rough terrain makes it easy for them to attack anyone who invades their territory.

Typical monsters include ancient Indian spirits roused from their slumber by the greed and lack of respect for nature sometimes shown by both real estate developers and mining companies, ill-tempered creatures living in a cave or an abandoned mine that has become the local hangout for teens looking for a private spot for a party, and the now ubiquitous packs of werewolves who have made that midnight stroll in the snow with a flask of brandy and your sweetheart a very bad idea indeed.

A more realistic campaign can involve a natural creature, but one that is an unusually large, aggressive, and intelligent representative of its species. Grizzly bears and cougars are good options here. Wolves are also a possibility, although real wolves rarely attack people. However, animals that are abnormal for some reason are a stock plot device that any GM can use. These creatures might may be rabid or perhaps have been driven insane as part of some secret government or corporate research project.

In the case of a secret project, it is possible that the researchers engaged in fraud to get their funding (proposals that sound like they have been written by mad scientists usually do not get funded) and now they need to cover up the evidence of their crimes; this means eliminating any witnesses. Of course, the dangerously aggressive behavior of the animals in question might simply be an unexpected consequence of a perfectly sound research project, and any scientists or government agents who insist on joining the player characters on their expedition may be totally innocent of any sinister plans, as eager as anyone else to eliminate the danger to the public. On the other hand, it probably does not hurt to keep a close eye on them.

One can look for human monsters in the mountains, too. Whether the bad guy is a cultist with a compound and a group of fanatical followers, an ex-commando driven insane by his horrifying experiences on the battlefield, or a

cunning serial killer with a taste for the outdoors, any GM can build an exciting adventure by having a group of player characters hunt down some dangerous human quarry. The adventure will become even more exciting when the tables are turned, as they almost always are, and the hunters become the hunted.

Jane would also be useful if the player characters are engaged in a "treasure hunt." The "treasure" can be almost anything -- a frozen body of a prehistoric man left by an earlier expedition that ran into trouble, a lost mine that may hold untold riches, or the wreckage of a plane that crashed in the wilderness with something valuable onboard.

Such adventures can be played as straight "human vs. nature" stories, with the characters avoiding and surviving various natural hazards to reach the "treasure" and then bring it back. In some cases, the adventure may be a race against time, depending on what the player characters are seeking. A GM can also add other characters interested in finding the "treasure," dangerous and desperate individuals willing to kill to keep the player characters from reaching their goal.

Another option for including Jane in an adventure is to have her appear not as a guide but as a handyman. Perhaps she has quit her job as a ski instructor and is looking for work; she might take a position as a caretaker for a mountain lodge owned by one of the player characters or the wealthy individual who has hired them. Later on, her other skills may keep the player characters alive. And the fact that this is the first time she has worked as a caretaker (and perhaps only got the job because the previous caretaker died suddenly, leaving the owner of the lodge scrambling to find someone who could fill the position) may allow her to serve as a red herring that will distract player characters from the real villain.

Using Jane as a red herring is also possible if the adventure is set at the resort where she is working as an instructor. Jane is beautiful, capable, and confident; many characters might think she is too good to not be some kind of femme fatale.

Another way to use Jane in a campaign would be if her parents or brother had vanished, been attacked, or died under mysterious circumstances. A GM could simply use her as a client, hiring the player characters to find out what has happened to her family members, if he or she wanted. But it is likely that if the adventure involves searching mountainous or other rough terrain that Jane would insist on joining the party -- as she puts it, if she is paying for an expedition, she is going with it. The characters will probably be pleasantly surprised by how useful she is, and there might be some room for humorous role-playing if any of the player characters know how to ski, and do not realize how good Jane is on the slopes, and challenge her to a little contest. (If any PC should actually best Jane, she will be very impressed indeed.)

Jane also offers an opportunity for romantic sub-plots. She is beautiful and capable, exactly the sort of companion many male player characters (and some female ones) would seek. Can one of our heroes heal her wounded heart and renew her ability to love? If the character does this, he gains an Ally (and Jane's quirk of being wary of serious romance will be replaced with a new one emphasizing her love for the character), but her penchant for taking risks may make the relationship an interesting one.

There is also the possibility of a mystery plot because of Jane's personal history. If something should happen to Bill Finney or his wife, she might be a suspect. She might even be guilty.

Adapting Jane for earlier time periods is simple, as most of her skills will remain the same. Americans have been skiing recreationally since the 1870s, and the National Ski Association was created in 1904, so Jane could reasonably appear in any campaign set from the 1920s on (i.e., a Cliffhangers campaign), and perhaps even a late period Old West or Steampunk campaign, with minimal changes to her character (in most cases, Computer Operation should be replaced with Typing; in some cases, Driving, Mechanic, and/or Electrician might be replaced with more period-appropriate skills like Bicycling, Animal Handling, Teamster, Sewing, or even Electronics Operation (Communication), which would cover using a telegraph). Near or even distant future campaigns are also possible with small modifications; tourism is alive and well in many science fiction settings, and a character who can fix machines and serve as a wilderness guide will almost always prove useful in campaigns set in a post-apocalyptic world.

Adapting Jane for different locations (e.g., a British woman working at a resort in the Swiss Alps) is also a simple

matter of modifying her biography and a few of her skills.

Jane Richards   *200 points*

5'5" 130 lbs. Late twenties. Blonde. Blue eyes.

Attributes: **ST** 9 [-10]; **DX** 13 [60]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 12 [20]
BL 16 [0] HP 9 [0] Will 12 [0] Per 12 [0] FP 12 [0] Basic Move 6.25 [0]

Cultural Familiarity: Western [0]

Languages: English (native) [0]; German (accented) [4]

Advantages: Beautiful [12]; Daredevil [15]; Fit [5]

Disadvantages: Pacifism (Reluctant Killer) [-5]; Sense of Duty (Her family and anyone she is teaching or guiding through the wilderness) [-5]

Quirks: Enjoys taking risks [-1]; Likes intelligent and educated people who do not act like snobs (+1 to reaction rolls) [-1]; Loves the mountains [-1]; Outgoing [-1]; Wary of serious romance because of what happened the last time she fell in love [-1]

Skills: Area Knowledge (Colorado Rockies)-14 [4]; Carpentry-12 [1]; Climbing-13 [2]; Computer Operation-12 [1]; Cooking-12 [2]; Dancing-12 [1]; Driving (Automobile)-13 [2]; Driving (Snowmobile)-13 [2]; Electrician-12 [2]; First Aid-12 [1]; Geology-12 [4]; Guns (Rifle)-13 [1]; Hiking-13 [4]; Housekeeping-12 [1]; Leadership-12 [2]; Mechanic (Automobile)-12 [2]; Naturalist-12 [4]; Navigation (Land)-13 [4]; Riding (Horse)-12 [1]; Skiing-15 [16]; Stealth-13 [2]; Survival (Mountain)-13 [4]; Teaching-13 [4]; Tracking-12 [2]

Things I Love As A GM (Player Edition)

Okay; you know the drill. I'm letting my emotions flow freely onto the page, tapping my inner rage or giddy joy to discuss things I hate or love as a gamer or GM.

Unfortunately, as a relatively repressed self-controlled individual, my inner rage and giddiest joy generally manifests as random noodling on the page. Mmm . . . noodles.

Anyway, since I deviated a week to sate my booze-and-tax-frenzied fingers with hexadecimal hate, this week's mathematical iteration on our matrix is things I love as a GM. Remember: This go-around we're talking about things I love from players as a GM. The password is swordfish.

* * *

Players who use their game-world knowledge for good. One of the facts that struck me during my recent bout of putting RPG books on eBay was how many of them qualified under my classification system as "Mint; never read." Since I'm also a collector, this wouldn't be particularly disturbing . . . if it weren't for the fact that many of these game books were for systems I've run, and thus was theoretically supposed to be familiar with.

But at least ever since I ran an *Exalted* game having skimmed many chapters of the core rulebook (and probably years before that), I've contended myself with the fact that any players I run a game for using an established world or system will probably know that world or system better than I do. A lot better, usually.

Now, some players use this information as a club, and proceed to pretend that I'm a baby seal. The rules mongers will berate me for "incorrect" decisions while the continuity mavens will chastise me for not hewing closely enough to the official universe. Strangely enough, most of these players do not find themselves invited back to my campaigns after the initial player-testing mini-series is over. ("Hey! Are you going to re-start the *Otter: The Frolicking* campaign?" "Oooh, yeahhh . . . ummm, actually, we decided to restart the game on that day you said you weren't free." "But I'm free every day!" "Ahh. Erm. Well, we made up a new day.")

But the good players will go along with my madcap whims (since I'm not exactly a killer GM). And the *great* players will let me know -- either during the game or afterwards -- where I may have deviated from their expectations, and *give me ideas for how to incorporate it.* Thus a great rules-master might say, "I know you're allowing accumulated successes to advance the game, but you might want to make sure that we can't use that to make magic items, or else the game might get out of hand." Or a continuity hound might inform me something along the lines of: "I didn't want to say anything because it was important to your plot, but the Knights of St. Whitin are forbidden from killing unless it's vital to save an innocent life. So, if you wanted to use that, you might want to mention that the knight has been called to be tried by his peers, or you might want to make sure we learn how he felt that he need to kill in order to save innocents. Of course, it's also possible the Knights do things differently in *your* universe . . ."

I know there are many different ways to GM, but for the most part I've been firmly in the "collaborative storytelling" camp. I figure, we're all in this together, and if you have a good idea for making the game better then I'd be a fool to ignore it. As such, players who use their knowledge to enhance the experience are (as I see it) enabling us all to exceed the sum of our parts. Of course, this is easiest when the players are forces for good, and not using their knowledge as a weapon against me.

Speaking of being in this together . . .

Players who make it clear what parts of their characters are off-limits and what parts are open game. I love it when players give me good character descriptions and backgrounds. These don't need to be 80-page magnum penguins, but even a bit of information can make a world of difference, whether it's providing a strong sense of where the character came from, how his life was shaped, and what forces continue to work on him. The reason I love this information is because, when possible, I try to tie adventures and subplots into the histories of the PCs. After all, the

game and universe revolves around them, and practically every character is an accumulation of the elements of their past that brought them to that point today.

However, some players react more negatively than others when certain elements from their characters' pasts are brought back; this can be especially true if the element that is introduced is (or seems to be) detrimental to the PC . . . and, of course, since most plots develop through adversity, such detrimental developments are somewhat common. For example, if a player writes in a long-lost father into his backstory, then I might have that father just show up one day, preferably on the player's [front door]. But I've had some players in this situation who are just unwilling to accept this new development, because I have -- for some unknown reason -- touched something in that backstory that was off-limits. They'll say things like, "My father wouldn't act this way" or "I'm finding this plot development too unbelievable" or the like.

In discussing the matter further with these players, what's usually happened is that I've accidentally stumbled across some aspect of their backstory that they don't want messed with, only they didn't let me know that fact. (This has even happened after I've specifically said, "Is there any aspect of this history that you don't want me touching on, dealing with, or incorporating into the story?")

However, some players are *very* good about informing me what they would and would not like to deal with from their backstories. For example, one player in a Supers campaign made it clear that he didn't want his character's parents to be killed, maimed, or otherwise turn out to be evil. "What about threatened, or harmed indirectly?" I asked. The player was fine with that, and so I got to run a subplot where someone deduced there was a connection between the PC's heroic and secret identity (although he didn't make the logical leap of "same person"), and was attempting to get at the heroic PC by affecting the secret ID's parents, driving them to bankruptcy. The player, knowing that I'd promised I wouldn't kill or maim the NPC parents, had a great time, getting to serve first as a provider for the parents and then as the righter of their wrongs. But this was only possible because the player made his expectations known ahead of time.

So for all you players who let the GM know what elements of the character are off-limits . . . I raise a glass to you. Keep it up.

Players who bring props. For some reason, many gamers have concluded that props are only the province of GMs, and seldom do anything tangible themselves (despite the fact that most players seem to love it when I bring props into the game). A few players have bucked this trend, though, crafting actual letters they give to NPCs, devising newspaper clippings, finding photographs of "their characters and NPCs," and so on. Even a slight bit of costuming -- such as a headband worn by the player of a martial arts character or a fedora for a pulp detective -- can go a long way toward helping to establish that world.

* * *

Well, that's it for this installment. As ever, feel free to send your thoughts to me via [e-mail] or over on the [discussion boards]. Next week we should be finishing up our latest go-around on the love train, unless we don't.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Mutants & Masterminds Second Edition

Published by [Green Ronin](#)

Designed by Steve Kenson

Edited by Jon Leitheusser, Evan Sass, Marc Schmalz, & Chris Pramas

Art & graphics by Hal Mangold, Ramón Pérez, Attila Adorjany, Balaskas, Brett Barkley, Greg Boychuk, Eric Canete, Jeff Carlisle, Sean Chen, Steve Conley, Storn A. Cook, Talon Dunning, Tom Fowler, Tariq Hassan, Cully Hamner, Scott James, Georges Jeanty, Christopher Jones, "Rey" Lewis, Axel Ortiz, Tony Parker, Ramon k Perez, Conley Philpott, Steve Scott, Kevin Stokes, Craig Taillifer, Udon with Chris Stevens, Dexter Vines, Eric Wight, Marc Schmalz, & Rick Achberger

256-page full-color hardcover; $39.95

[*Mutants and Masterminds*](#) took the game world by storm four years ago. With everyone scrambling for *d20 System*-compatible works to score a coveted *d20 System* cover logo, Green Ronin decided to test looser waters -- so long as you stuck to the OGL and forewent the ***Dungeons & Dragons***-suggestive insignia, you had free rein in your book. As with any second edition, the two questions on everyone's mind are, "Do I have to buy this thing again?" and "Well . . . is it worth it?"

Some cosmetics: 192 pages became 256 cheaper, gloriously full-color pages. The artwork is by many of the same names, and the style has even matured. It still follows the "one chapter per subject" format, even for brief topics, but with fewer full-page indulgences. Major ideas like how rolls and saving throws work are summarized neatly. The paper miniatures and reference pages are gone (look for them at the website or in the upcoming screen).

There are more villains (and minions, monsters, animals . . .), but they and the hero templates are generic ("super simians" replace Dr. Simian) and stats are boxed out of the text body so they're easier to digest. The GM section is much longer, including plenty of comic genre conventions, but for a textbook it's fun reading. One introductory adventure has split into two . . . a bank heist to get the heroes' booted feet wet, and a training exercise with the Freedom League that (of course) turns into something else. The simplicity of the first is understandable, but the second has needlessly predictable twists.

The mechanical changes are worth noting (*and* were worth making). In the first edition you bought an ability (say, Strength) and the concomitant super-ability (Super-Strength). Both gave you bonuses and they were added together. Now you may be limited to certain levels or bonuses, but it's all pretty linear -- just buy what you need.

The powers (that's what everyone showed up for, right?) are very streamlined. Similar effects have become one (Super-Senses offers a big list); improving abilities is mostly nonspecific (ability X goes up Y points); and some forms of movement are also grouped, getting a little strange sometimes. Super-Speed combines Speed (going 20 mph instead of 10) and Quickness (doing crosswords instantly), for example. Granted, that's popular, but crawling up walls? You

have to buy that from Super-Movement. Why not a movement-related data dump like Super-Senses? The powers list is longer now, but . . .

A similar quirk is X Control (Time Control, Vibration Control, Electrical, ad nausea). They're now more like a player's guide to possibilities. Time Control could Snare someone (frozen in time) or allow Super-Speed (increase the flow of time). The power's description isn't the definition. While it's a good way to show off the system's versatility, these entries (more than two dozen of them) could have been one section of advice at the chapter's outset. Lots of little bookkeeping items too numerous to list don't help (Power Stunts are now Alternate Powers, the Doubling Values Table is the Time and Value Progression Table, etc.).

Skills and feats are cheaper (one PP buys you four skill ranks), which the Batman will find gratifying. The power level still limits you but can be tweaked. In a PL 10 game, your Attack Bonus maxes at +10 (Attack and Defense are now their own stats, incidentally). You can raise that by lowering the DC Save (how hard it is for your enemies to resist your powers); your Defense Bonus and Toughness are also paired. These links let you make a ninja who moves and strikes impossibly fast but, if tagged in combat, drops like a VCR price tag.

Hero Points. You know 'em, you love 'em, most games have 'em. They let you break the rules, change die rolls, add bonuses, etc. They used to be added every other power level; now you start every session with just one. But . . .

Time was, a weakness to irradiated bats or the tendency to become Lou Ferrigno when upset added Power Points to your character. Weaknesses are old news, replaced by drawbacks and complications. Drawbacks, like harder-to-control powers, are game mechanics you fine-tune by severity and frequency to suit your PP needs. Complications are storytelling devices. If your aged Aunt Gertrude inconveniently shows up, her intrusion is worth points. Villain Points are gone; if players suffer the sort of curveball that irks the average gamer like the bad guy escaping (a GM "fiat"), you again get a point. Hero Points are the result of the adventure and roleplaying, not some predictable horde of magic power, and accumulating them throughout the session lets you satisfyingly let loose at the climax.

There are other complaints to be leveled, mostly minor. Only fairly big sections of text get a different font color or size -- smaller subheadings may run together. The editing slacks off the last couple of chapters. The real problems? Combat -- it's only increased a couple of pages, but the formulae are scattered throughout. They desperately need to be grouped and, in the upcoming screen, soon will be. The other irritation is the power level limits. There's a ceiling on, say, damage (to prevent powers that level a city block), but there are exceptions to those limits and a definitive list would be handy. Things like Strength can be bumped up for pushing buildings back into place, but they don't want you using it to puree villains.

Mutants and Masterminds: Second Edition is the rare animal that improves upon the original in a meaningful way. Your old copy may be useful as reference in some ways, but there are enough changes that going to the new book is the only way to keep some of the ideas and changes straight in your mind. It's not an instance of a company making more money with a new version; this is palpably worthwhile as a fresh purchase, because if you enjoyed the first you'll love the second.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Kablamo: A Fast-Spinning Game Of Russian Roulette

Published by [Gigantoskop](#)

Designed by Christoffer Krämer & Jesper Moberg

Five Revolver boards, 20 Live Bullet tiles, 67 Action Bullet tiles, 13 High Velocity Bullet tiles, Ammunition Bag, & Rules folder; $30

My gaming group's favorite game is GDW's **Red Empire: The Card Game of Soviet Power Politics.** It is almost our default game, which lets us do the nasty on each as we work to denounce and purge members of rival factions within the Politburo. The aim being to politick our way into the position of President of the Soviet Union, and once there, try to survive more crisis than previous incumbents. Silly accents are of course, mandatory. Orbital Mind Control Laser receptors under very large hats (actually Ushankas) have proven to be a recurring motive when it comes to denouncing rivals. At the other end of the gaming scale and also at the other end of Soviet history is **Kablamo: A Fast-Spinning Game Of Russian Roulette.**

It comes from Gigantoskop, the Swedish publisher of the delightfully playable, yet titled in poor taste, **_Spank the Monkey_**. Where that game's title was potentially beyond the pale, it is this new game's subject matter that may be so. The situation is simple. The second and Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 has spelled the end of the good life for the Tsarist nobility. A year later and they are landless, enemies of the state, and likely to face a firing squad in the very near future. Which forlorn situation leaves the nobility ready and willing to entertain themselves with the country's number one game with a bullet, Russian Roulette. The problem of course, is that while any other game that lets you blow up, put to the sword, and generally kill the enemy is perfectly all acceptable, the idea of having a game in which could put a bullet in your brain . . . Well, that is just _soooo_ wrong. Alternatively, and after a five-second-reality check, this is _just_ a game.

Actually what **Kablamo** turns out to be is a game of memory and chaos in which the players load their revolvers, take aim, and then pull the triggers to unleash a range of surprising effects beyond the expected "click" or "kaboom!" (to be followed by a splatter, splurgle, and other noises beginning with the letters "S" and "P"). The aim is manipulate the various effects to your advantage, swapping bullets hither and thither so that your opponents blow their brains out while you are left standing.

Designed for two to five players, **Kablamo** comes well-appointed with five Revolver Boards, over 100 Bullet Tiles -- cardboard disks that sit neatly on the chamber spaces in each Revolver, a cloth bag for the ammunition, and a clearly presented rules folder. Some assembly is required, but this is easy enough with the aid of a screwdriver, the plastic nuts and bolts provided being a little stiff for the fingers.

The game is played via the Revolver Boards, one per player. Naturally, it has six chambers ready to be loaded, with the top chamber marked with the weapon's hammer. It is from this chamber that the rounds are discharged. To the immediate left of the Hammer Position is the Safe Position, the contents of which can only be manipulated by the Revolver's owner.

A player begins the game with eight Bullets, six of which have to be loaded into his Revolver. The remaining two are kept as spares. On a turn, all of the players rotate the cylinders of their Revolvers simultaneously and then turn over the new Bullet under the Hammer to resolve its effect. The yellow colored Live Bullets are Instants that go off immediately with one of two effects. "Kablamo" Bullets kill you stone dead immediately, while "Click" Bullets indicate a dud that lets a participant keep on playing. Both of the white-colored Action Bullets and red-colored High

Velocity Bullets come in 13 varieties, and both types can be aimed at your opponents rather than your own temple. High Velocity Bullets can also be played directly from your hand and not just from your weapon. Every Bullet Tile (except for Live Bullets) is marked with a timing number on it, the lowest numbered rounds being resolved first.

So what can Action Bullets and High Velocity Bullets actually do? Action Bullets include effects like "Hammer Malfunction" that prevents another player from revealing his next Bullet; "Cylinder Malfunction" which forces a Cylinder to rotate counter-clockwise rather than clockwise; "Slight of Hand" lets you swap one of Bullets with another player's random Bullet; "Test of Honor" lets you reload another player's Revolver on his next turn; and "Trigger Malfunction," which forces another Bullet to be discharged rather than the one under the Hammer.

While there is more than one of any type of Action Bullet, there is only one of each of the High Velocity Bullets. They include the amusingly named "Bolshevik Rules," which causes any "Kablamo" Bullet revealed on the next turn to eliminate the player on the revealing player's left; "Ricochet" enables a player to duplicate the effect of any just-played Action or High Velocity Bullet; and "Lights Out" that lets a player swap his Revolver with another player!

After all Bullets have been revealed and resolved, each player draws as many new Bullets as he has empty chambers in his Revolver. All resolved Bullets are discarded, except for Live Bullets, which are returned to the Ammunition Bag to be drawn in subsequent rounds.

This is very much a game of memory that quickly descends into chaos, as players manipulate the contents of their Revolvers while trying to remember what was loaded and where. It plays as long as there are players, the last one left standing with a Revolver in his hand being the winner. A game should not last much longer than the suggested minimum of 15 minutes, and rarely should it long as last as 45! Learning the game is very easy, and helped by the clearly written rules (which include a couple of variants), and the solidly produced components.

Yet when I tried **Kablamo** with my players, they were less than impressed. They deemed it too chaotic and disliked the knockout quality of the game, which despite being designed to be quick, left them waiting while each player fiddled around with the contents of his Revolver. That said, I am more pragmatic about the game, feeling that **Kablamo** will work better with groups that might appreciate better its chaotic charms. If you can live with the chaos, then **Kablamo: A fast-spinning game of Russian roulette** is a well appointed, light, beer 'n' pretzels (self-)shoot 'em up.

--Matthew Pook

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

[Irregular Webcomic](#)

Return To The War Of Dominia

by K. David Ladage

Author's Notes

Back on April 2, 1999, I had my first article for *Pyramid* published. This article, "[The War of Dominia](#)," was a moderate success. The idea was sound, the concepts interesting, but the reaction to having an article about one of those games in Pyramid was a bit underwhelming. Despite all of that, it managed to get a slightly above average rating, and got me hooked on writing things for *Pyramid.*

Now, in the nearly seven years since that article was published, **Magic: The Gathering** has changed. A lot. In fact, the rules have gone through a major overhaul, and some minor tweaks since then. Many of the abilities and things I reference in the original article have been phased out of the game entirely (pardon the pun). So, I wrote to our esteemed editor and asked if it would be possible to allow me to revisit the article and bring it up to the modern rules. The fact that you are reading this should give you an idea as to what answer I received.

Introduction

Have you ever noticed that a pair of 2/3 creatures in **Magic: The Gathering,** outside of magical intervention, cannot kill one another? Or that neither creature in a pair with first strike can get the upper hand? Or that every plane that the writers of the back-stories for the world's most popular Collectible Card Game is essentially the same -- the players change, the cards change, but the meta-physics (a.k.a.: the rules of the duel) remain constant? Have you ever wondered why one duel has little or no effect on the next duel?

In this variation, each of these assumptions might not be true. Things can get a little odd and the various planes are as varied as the cards themselves.

Tournaments

In the original version of "The War of Dominia," their was a disclaimer stating that the structure of the tournament rules were not for the faint of heart. The structure was set up such that it was a set of alternate rules, as well as an actually war for the control over a multiverse. The problem with this structure is that it limits the ability of players to experience the more interesting aspects of this variation on the game, unless they are willing to invest several weeks (or even months) to the act of playing out the tournament.

Thus, in this new vision of the rules, the structure is set up such that it affects the individual games, but allows the players or tournament organizers to the use any of the popular structures they wish -- from sealed to constructed, single elimination or double elimination, fixed tree or Swiss pairings. For those that would like to have a true mapped multiverse, please refer to the original article. That structure can be a lot of fun in small groups. The rest of you, please keep reading.

The Duels Of Dominia

A match (being a best two-out-of-three or three-out-of-five duels) in a War of Dominia game is played much the same as a standard match of *Magic: The Gathering.* There are a few other things to keep in mind, but they are outlined below.

1. Calculate the life values for each player.
2. Draw the faux-ante cards.
3. Generate the Planar Constant(s) for the duel, if any.
4. Play the duel.
5. Repeat steps 1 through 4 until the match is over.

1. Calculate Starting Life For Each Player

For the first duel in any match, each player stars with 20 life. Each duel after that, each player loses 5 life for each duel that they have lost in the current match.

Example

Andy and Betty sit down to play. This is the first game of a best three-out-of-five match, so they each start with 20 life. Betty wins the first duel. Since Betty won, in the second duel of the match, she will start the game with 20 life, but Andy will start the game with 15 life. Still, he manages to win the second duel.

Since each player has lost a duel, they will both start the third game with 15 life. Andy wins the third duel.

Betty has won one duel, Andy has won two duels. As this is a best three-out-of-five match, the games continue. In this round, Andy starts the game with 15 life and Betty starts the game with 10 life. If Andy wins this round, then Betty has been defeated and the match is over; otherwise, they will both start the fifth duel of the match with 10 life and play it out from there.

Note: In the case of a duel that ends up a draw, the duel is considered nullified for purposes of determining the number of victories needed to win the match; and neither player will lose any additional life in the next duel of that match.

2. Draw The Faux Ante Cards

Ante is a concept that existed in the original release of *Magic: The Gathering.* The idea was that each player would put one card (at random) from their deck at risk in each duel. It added a sense of uncertainty and tension to the game, as well as acted as a universal balancing tool. After all, the Black Lotus may be an awe inspiring card, but if you want to play with that bad boy, you had to put it at risk in every single game.

So why did ante go away?

Consider that, at its peak, a mint condition Black Lotus could easily pull $2,500 if one was willing to sell it. This means that 10-year-old kids were in violation of many State's gambling laws each time they played! So ante had to go away, and with it that sense of uncertainty and tension (not to mention some of the most interesting -- and frustrating -- cards to have ever be created!). The War of Dominia aims to bring back to the game some of that uncertainty and tension, only without the whole going-to-jail-for-breaking-the-law part. We do this with a faux ante and the resulting possibility of a Planar Constant.

After each player has shuffled their deck, and the opponent has been given an opportunity to cut, the top card of each deck is removed and set aside, face up. If the card you ante up is anything other than a land card, then this card will have no further effect on the game. If, however, the card you ante up is a land card, please see Step 3, below.

3. Generate The Planar Constant For The Duel

A Planar Constant is a rule that is in effect for the duration of a duel. This rule cannot be ignored, turned off, canceled or affected in any way. It represents the meta-physics of the plane on which the duel is taking place. After each player antes up a card in Step 2, above, check to see if either of these cards is a land card. If it is, then a planar constant needs to be generated for each land card in the ante. To apply this rule, the player that anted the land card rolls a d66 (see below) on the chart that corresponds to the land type they have anted.

If neither player antes up a land card, then no planar constants are generated; if both players ante up a land card, then the duel will have (at least) two planar constants generated.

Example

Andy and Betty sit down to play. Andy is playing a Red-White Boros deck (from the Ravnica set). Betty is playing a Green-Black spirit deck (from the Kamigawa set). Andy ante's up a Boros Guildmage. This is not a land card, so he will not be rolling up a planar constant in this duel. Betty antes up a forest; thus, she will be rolling on the forest planar constant chart to see what this particular plane of Dominia happens to be like.

4. Play The Duel

Play the duel as normal, taking into account the variable of starting life and any Planar Constants. If sideboards are allowed, cards may be swapped out after the Planar Constant is set for that duel.

5. Repeat Steps 1 Through 4 . . .

When one player has accumulated enough victories, the match is over.

Planar Constant Charts

Notes And Symbol Key

- A T in brackets, i.e.: {T}, indicates the tap symbol.
- A number in brackets, i.e.: {1}, indicates an amount of generic mana.
- An X in brackets, i.e.: {X}, indicates a variable amount of generic mana.
- A dice code in brackets, i.e.: {1d6}, indicates a fixed amount of generic mana that is determined by a die roll prior to the duel beginning.

  For example: if a Planar Constant indicates that All activated abilities cost {1d6}, in addition to any other activation costs, then, prior the duel beginning, one player rolls a six-sided die; this sets the fixed amount of additional generic mana that all activated abilities will cost.

- A dice code outside of brackets, i.e. 1d6, indicates a fixed amount that is determined by a die roll prior to the duel beginning. For example: if a Planar Constant indicates that Whenever a player puts a permanent into play, he or she gains 1d6 life. , then, prior the duel beginning, one player rolls a six-sided die; this sets the fixed amount of life that is gained for each permanent that is put into play.
- A letter other than X or T in brackets, i.e.: {W}, {U}, {B}, {R}, and {G}, indicates a point of mana of a specific color -- WHITE, BLUE, BLACK, RED, and GREEN, respectively.
- For purposes of these rules, the term keyword ability refers to all abilities listed in Section 502 of the Comprehensive Rules with the exceptions of Enchant, and Substance. Additionally, it includes the terms: Indestructible, and Unblockable.
- As of this writing, the keyword abilities that fall under this heading are: Affinity, Amplify, Banding (Bands, Bands With Other), Bloodthirst, Bushido, Buyback, Convoke, Cumulative Upkeep, Cycling, Defender, Desertwalk, Double Strike, Dredge, Echo, Entwine, Epic, Equip, Fading, Fear, First Strike, Flanking, Flashback, Flying, Forestwalk, Haste, Haunt, Horsemanship, Imprint, Indestructible, Islandwalk, Kicker, Legendary

Landwalk, Madness, Modular, Morph, Mountainwalk, Ninjutsu, Non-Basic Landwalk, Offering, Phasing, Plainswalk, Protection, Provoke, Rampage, Replicate, Scry, Shadow, Soulshift, Splice, Storm, Sunburst, Swampwalk, Threshold, Trample, Transmute, Unblockable, and Vigilance.

Basic Land -- Plain

11	All white spells cost {1} less to cast.
12	All white spells cost {1d6} less to cast.
13	All white spells cost {W} less to cast.
14	All white spells cost {W} more to cast.
15	All white spells cost {1d6} more to cast.
16	All white spells cost {1} more to cast.
21	All white Creatures gain Haste.
22	All white Creatures gain First Strike.
23	All white Creatures gain "this can only be blocked by white or Artifact Creatures."
24	All white Creatures gain "{W}{W}, {T}: Target player gains 1 life."
25	All white Creatures gain "{T}: Add {1} to your mana pool."
26	All white Creatures gain "{T}: Add {W} to your mana pool."
31	All white permanents gain Cycling (2).
32	All white permanents gain Echo.
33	All white permanents gain Fading 1d6.
34	All white permanents gain Phasing.
35	All white permanents gain "During your upkeep, pay {1} or sacrifice this."
36	All white permanents gain "During your upkeep, gain 1 life."
41	All non-Basic Lands gain "{T}: Add {W} to your mana pool."
42	All Basic Plains gain "Place the top card of your library in your graveyard, {T}: Add {W}{W} to your mana pool."
43	All Basic Lands gain "{T}: Add {W} to your mana pool."
44	All Basic Lands gain "Place the top card of your library in your graveyard, {T}: Add {W}{W} to your mana pool."
45	All Basic Plains gain "{W}{W}, {T}: Put a 0/5 white creature token with Defender and First Strike into play.
46	All non-Basic Lands gain "{3}, {T}: Put a 0/5 colorless creature token with Defender and First Strike into play.
51	All non-white Creatures gain "During your upkeep, pay {1} or sacrifice this."
52	All non-white Creatures gain Cycling {2}.
53	All non-white Creatures gain Echo.
54	All non-white Creatures gain Fading 1d6.
55	All non-white Creatures gain Phasing.
56	All non-white Creatures gain Plainswalk.
61	Whenever a player puts a Plain into play, that player gains 1 life.
62	Whenever a player plays a white spell, that player gains 1 life.
63	Each player gains 1 life during their Upkeep Step.
64	In addition to being Basic Land, all Plains are 2/1 White Spirit Creatures with Defender and First Strike.
65	Roll on the Non-Basic Land chart.
66	Roll on the Radical chart.

Basic Land -- Island

11	All blue spells cost {1} less to cast.
12	All blue spells cost {1d6} less to cast.
13	All blue spells cost {U} less to cast.

14	All blue spells cost {U} more to cast.
15	All blue spells cost {1d6} more to cast.
16	All blue spells cost {1} more to cast.
21	All blue Creatures gain Haste.
22	All blue Creatures gain Flying.
23	All blue Creatures gain "this can only be blocked by blue or Artifact Creatures."
24	All blue Creatures gain "{U}{U}, {T}: Return target Creature to its owner's hand."
25	All blue Creatures gain "{T}: Add {1} to your mana pool."
26	All blue Creatures gain "{T}: Add {U} to your mana pool."
31	All blue permanents gain Cycling (2).
32	All blue permanents gain Echo.
33	All blue permanents gain Fading 1d6.
34	All blue permanents gain Phasing.
35	All blue permanents gain "During your upkeep, pay {1} or sacrifice this."
36	All blue permanents gain "During your upkeep, gain 1 life."
41	All non-Basic Lands gain "{T}: Add {U} to your mana pool."
42	All Basic Islands gain "Place the top card of your library in your graveyard, {T}: Add {U}{U} to your mana pool."
43	All Basic Lands gain "{T}: Add {U} to your mana pool."
44	All Basic Lands gain "Place the top card of your library in your graveyard, {T}: Add {U}{U} to your mana pool."
45	All Basic Islands gain "{U}{U}, {T}: Put a 2/2 blue creature token with Defender and Flying.
46	All non-Basic Lands gain "{3}, {T}: Put a 2/2 colorless creature token with Defender and Flying.
51	All non-blue Creatures gain "During your upkeep, pay {1} or sacrifice this."
52	All non-blue Creatures gain Cycling {2}.
53	All non-blue Creatures gain Echo.
54	All non-blue Creatures gain Fading 1d6.
55	All non-blue Creatures gain Phasing.
56	All non-blue Creatures gain Islandwalk.
61	Whenever a player puts an Island into play, that player gains 1 life.
62	Whenever a player plays a blue spell, that player gains 1 life.
63	Each player may target one non-land permanent during their Upkeep Step; that permanent is returned to its owner's hand.
64	In addition to being Basic Land, all Islands are 0/3 Blue Spirit Creatures with Defender and Flying.
65	Roll on the Non-Basic Land chart.
66	Roll on the Radical chart.

Basic Land -- Swamp

11	All black spells cost {1} less to cast.
12	All black spells cost {1d6} less to cast.
13	All black spells cost {B} less to cast.
14	All black spells cost {B} more to cast.
15	All black spells cost {1d6} more to cast.
16	All black spells cost {1} more to cast.
21	All black Creatures gain Haste.
22	All black Creatures gain Swampwalk.
23	All black Creatures gain "this can only be blocked by black or Artifact Creatures."
24	All black Creatures gain "{B}{B}, {T}: Destroys target Creature."
25	All black Creatures gain "{T}: Add {1} to your mana pool."

26	All black Creatures gain "{T}: Add {B} to your mana pool."
31	All black permanents gain Cycling (2).
32	All black permanents gain Echo.
33	All black permanents gain Fading 1d6.
34	All black permanents gain Phasing.
35	All black permanents gain "During your upkeep, pay {1} or sacrifice this."
36	All black permanents gain "During your upkeep, gain 1 life."
41	All non-Basic Lands gain "{T}: Add {B} to your mana pool."
42	All Basic Swamps gain "Place the top card of your library in your graveyard, {T}: Add {B}{B} to your mana pool."
43	All Basic Lands gain "{T}: Add {B} to your mana pool."
44	All Basic Lands gain "Place the top card of your library in your graveyard, {T}: Add {B}{B} to your mana pool."
45	All Basic Swamps gain "{B}{B}, {T}: Put a 3/1 black creature token with Defender and First Strike.
46	All non-Basic Lands gain "{3}, {T}: Put a 3/1 colorless creature token with Defender and First Strike.
51	All non-black Creatures gain "During your upkeep, pay {1} or sacrifice this."
52	All non-black Creatures gain Cycling {2}.
53	All non-black Creatures gain Echo.
54	All non-black Creatures gain Fading 1d6.
55	All non-black Creatures gain Phasing.
56	All non-black Creatures gain Swampwalk.
61	Whenever a player puts a Swamp into play, that player gains 1 life.
62	Whenever a player plays a black spell, that player gains 1 life.
63	Each player may target one opponent during their Upkeep Step, that player discards one card from his or her hand.
64	In addition to being Basic Land, all Swamps are 1/1 Black Spirit Creatures with Defender and "{B}: this gains +1/+0 until end of turn."
65	Roll on the Non-Basic Land chart.
66	Roll on the Radical chart.

Basic Land -- Mountain

11	All red spells cost {1} less to cast.
12	All red spells cost {1d6} less to cast.
13	All red spells cost {R} less to cast.
14	All red spells cost {R} more to cast.
15	All red spells cost {1d6} more to cast.
16	All red spells cost {1} more to cast.
21	All red Creatures gain Haste.
22	All red Creatures gain +1/+0.
23	All red Creatures gain "this can only be blocked by red or Artifact Creatures."
24	All red Creatures gain "{R}{R}, {T}: this deals 1 damage to target Creature or player."
25	All red Creatures gain "{T}: Add {1} to your mana pool."
26	All red Creatures gain "{T}: Add {R} to your mana pool."
31	All red permanents gain Cycling (2).
32	All red permanents gain Echo.
33	All red permanents gain Fading 1d6.
34	All red permanents gain Phasing.
35	All red permanents gain "During your upkeep, pay {1} or sacrifice this."
36	All red permanents gain "During your upkeep, gain 1 life."
41	All non-Basic Lands gain "{T}: Add {R} to your mana pool."

42	All Basic Mountains gain "Place the top card of your library in your graveyard, {T}: Add {R}{R} to your mana pool."
43	All Basic Lands gain "{T}: Add {R} to your mana pool."
44	All Basic Lands gain "Place the top card of your library in your graveyard, {T}: Add {R}{R} to your mana pool."
45	All Basic Mountains gain "{R}{R}, {T}: Put a 1/2 red creature token with First Strike and Haste into play.
46	All non-Basic Lands gain "{3}, {T}: Put a 1/2 colorless creature token with First Strike and Haste into play.
51	All non-red Creatures gain "During your upkeep, pay {1} or sacrifice this."
52	All non-red Creatures gain Cycling {2}.
53	All non-red Creatures gain Echo.
54	All non-red Creatures gain Fading 1d6.
55	All non-red Creatures gain Phasing.
56	All non-red Creatures gain Mountainwalk.
61	Whenever a player puts a Mountain into play, that player gains 1 life.
62	Whenever a player plays a red spell, that player gains 1 life.
63	Each player may target one opponent during their Upkeep Step, that player loses 1 life.
64	In addition to being Basic Land, all Mountains are 1/1 Red Spirit Creatures with Defender and "{R}: this loses Defender until end of turn."
65	Roll on the Non-Basic Land chart.
66	Roll on the Radical chart.

Basic Land -- Forest

11	All green spells cost {1} less to cast.
12	All green spells cost {1d6} less to cast.
13	All green spells cost {G} less to cast.
14	All green spells cost {G} more to cast.
15	All green spells cost {1d6} more to cast.
16	All green spells cost {1} more to cast.
21	All green Creatures gain Haste.
22	All green Creatures gain Trample.
23	All green Creatures gain "this can only be blocked by green or Artifact Creatures."
24	All green Creatures gain "{G}{G}, {T}: Regenerate target Creature."
25	All green Creatures gain "{T}: Add {1} to your mana pool."
26	All green Creatures gain "{T}: Add {G} to your mana pool."
31	All green permanents gain Cycling (2).
32	All green permanents gain Echo.
33	All green permanents gain Fading 1d6.
34	All green permanents gain Phasing.
35	All green permanents gain "During your upkeep, pay {1} or sacrifice this."
36	All green permanents gain "During your upkeep, gain 1 life."
41	All non-Basic Lands gain "{T}: Add {G} to your mana pool."
42	All Basic Forests gain "Place the top card of your library in your graveyard, {T}: Add {G}{G} to your mana pool."
43	All Basic Lands gain "{T}: Add {G} to your mana pool."
44	All Basic Lands gain "Place the top card of your library in your graveyard, {T}: Add {G}{G} to your mana pool."
45	All Basic Forests gain "{G}{G}, {T}: Put a 2/2 green creature token into play."
46	All non-Basic Lands gain "{3}, {T}: Put a 2/2 colorless creature token into play."
51	All non-red Creatures gain "During your upkeep, pay {1} or sacrifice this."
52	All non-red Creatures gain Cycling {2}.

53	All non-red Creatures gain Echo.
54	All non-red Creatures gain Fading 1d6.
55	All non-red Creatures gain Phasing.
56	All non-red Creatures gain Forestwalk.
61	Whenever a player puts a Forest into play, that player gains 1 life.
62	Whenever a player plays a green spell, that player gains 1 life.
63	Each player may target one non-land permanent during their Upkeep Step; that permanent gains Indestructible until the end of the turn.
64	In addition to being Basic Land, all Forests are 2/2 Green Spirit Creatures with Defender.
65	Roll on the Non-Basic Land chart.
66	Roll on the Radical chart.

Non-Basic Land

11	All Artifact spells cost {1} less to cast.
12	All Artifact spells cost {1d6} less to cast.
13	All Artifact spells cost {2d6} less to cast.
14	All Artifact spells cost {2d6} more to cast.
15	All Artifact spells cost {1d6} more to cast.
16	All Artifact spells cost {1} more to cast.
21	All Artifact Creatures gain Haste.
22	All Artifact Creatures gain Indestructible.
23	All Artifact Creatures gain Unblockable.
24	All Artifact Creatures gain "{2}, {T}: Tap target Creature."
25	All Artifact Creatures gain "{T}: Add {1} to your mana pool."
26	All Artifact Creatures gain "{T}: Add {1d6} to your mana pool."
31	Players may play Artifact spells anytime they could play an Instant spell.
32	Players may play Creature spells anytime they could play an Instant spell.
33	Players may play Enchantment spells anytime they could play an Instant spell.
34	Players may play Sorcery spells anytime they could play an Instant spell.
35	Players may play all spells anytime they could play an Instant spell.
36	Players may play Instant spells only when they could play a Sorcery spell.
41	All Artifacts come into play tapped.
42	All Basic Lands come into play tapped.
43	All Creatures come into play tapped.
44	All Lands come into play tapped.
45	All non-basic Lands come into play tapped.
46	All permanents come into play tapped.
51	All non-Artifact Creatures gain "During your upkeep, pay {1} or sacrifice this."
52	All non-Artifact Creatures gain Cycling {2}.
53	All non-Artifact Creatures gain Echo.
54	All non-Artifact Creatures gain Fading 1d6.
55	All non-Artifact Creatures gain Phasing.
56	All non-Artifact Creatures gain Unblockable.
61	Whenever a player puts a Basic Land into play, that player gains 1 life.
62	Whenever a player puts a non-Basic Land into play, that player gains 1 life.
63	Whenever a player plays an Artifact spell, that player gains 1 life.
64	In addition to being Land, all Non-Basic Lands are 1/1 colorless Spirit Creatures.
65	Roll on the Radical chart.
66	Roll twice on the Radical chart.

Radical

Note: Roll on this chart only if directed to do so from one of the other charts.

11	Change the Beginning Phase to: Upkeep Step, Untap Step, Draw Step.
12	Change the Beginning Phase to: Untap Step, Draw Step.
13	Remove the pre-combat portion of the Main Phase. (players must declare combat prior to the main phase starting)
14	Remove the post-combat portion of the Main Phase. (once players declare combat, there is no more main phase)
15	Change the End Phase to: Untap Step, End of Turn Step, Cleanup Step.
16	Change the End Phase to: Upkeep Step, End of Turn Step, Cleanup Step.
21	All keyword abilities that start with the letters A-E are nullified and have no effect.
22	All keyword abilities that start with the letters F-J are nullified and have no effect.
23	All keyword abilities that start with the letters K-O are nullified and have no effect.
24	All keyword abilities that start with the letters P-T are nullified and have no effect.
25	All keyword abilities that start with the letters U-Z are nullified and have no effect.
26	All keyword abilities are nullified and have no effect.
31	Each player, during their upkeep, gains 1 Blood Token. The rules for using Blood Tokens are below.
32	Each player, during their upkeep, gains 1d6 Blood Tokens. The rules for using Blood Tokens are below.
33	Each player, during their upkeep, gains 1 Heart Token. The rules for using Heart Tokens are below.
34	Each player, during their upkeep, gains 1d6 Heart Tokens. The rules for using Heart Tokens are below.
35	Each player, during their upkeep, gains 1 Node Token. The rules for using Node Tokens are below.
36	Each player, during their upkeep, gains 1d6 Node Tokens. The rules for using Node Tokens are below.
41	All upkeep costs become Cumulative Upkeep costs.
42	All activated abilities cost {1d6}, in addition to any other activation costs.
43	All spells cost an additional {1d6} to cast.
44	All creatures gain "Pay {1d6} during your upkeep, or sacrifice this."
45	Whenever a player puts a permanent into play, he or she gains 1d6 life.
46	Whenever a player puts a permanent into play, target opponent gains 1d6 life.
51	All non-Land permanents gain the Legendary super-type.
52	All cards with the Legendary super-type, lose that characteristic.
53	All non-Land permanents gain the Land type, and "{T}: Add {1} to your mana pool."
54	All non-Artifact permanents gain the Artifact type.
55	All non-Creature permanents gain the Creature -- Spirit type and sub-type, and have a Power and Toughness of 0/1.
56	Any card that would normally be removed from the game, is returned to its owner's hand instead.
61	Any card that would normally be removed from the game, is placed at the bottom of its owner's Library instead.
62	Any card that would normally be removed from the game, is placed into its owner's Graveyard instead.
63	Any card that would normally go to the Graveyard, is returned to its owner's hand instead (unless that card is being discarded due to maximum hand size).
64	Any card that would normally go to the Graveyard, is placed at the bottom of its owner's Library instead.
65	Any card that would normally go to the Graveyard, is removed from the game instead.
66	Roll twice on the Radical chart.

Blood, Heart, and Node Tokens

Items 31 through 36 on the Radical chart involve special tokens that players accumulate called Blood Tokens, Heart Tokens, and Node Tokens. These tokens are meta-game items that cannot be targeted by any spell or effect (i.e.: they are not artifacts, creatures, enchantments, land, or permanents of any kind). Each type of token has a special set of rules for its use.

- **Blood Tokens:** Players may sacrifice three Blood Tokens to deal one damage to a target creature. Damage dealt this way cannot be prevented or redirected.
- **Heart Tokens:** Players may sacrifice three Heart Tokens to prevent the next one damage that will be dealt to target creature.
- **Node Tokens:** Players may sacrifice three Node Tokens to add {1} to their mana pool.

Playtesting

by Joseph L. Babinsack

What makes a good playtester?

Is it knowing the mechanics or simply the observation? Is it the note taking or the innovation? Is it knowing the industry or knowing the genre? Is it arrogance or humility? Is it saying yes or saying no? Is it practice or theory? Is it all of the above, or all that and more?

Even the greatest concept is worthless if the game cannot be understood. The best materials cannot make up for the worst wording, nor can advertising overcome poorly conceived mechanics, nor can the most marketable licenses mean automatic success if something fundamental is overlooked. Theories are simply that: notions that look brilliant on the thought level, but remain unproven. Playtesting takes those unproven aspects and helps to shape the game into something that can be enjoyed out of the package.

Playtesting is not what makes the game, it's what makes the game meaningful.

Rules can be made to be broken, but broken rules are what the playtester sifts out of the finished product. Playtesters must be able identify the trouble spots in written rules. Even more, the playtester must be able to communicate those troubles, show where in the game process the issues lie, and clearly explain the situation.

What a playtester must do is take the game apart, examining each aspect individually, and then observe the connections (or lack thereof) throughout the play of dozens of games. What a playtester cannot do is play the game once, learn from anything other than the written rules, nor simply go through the motions and expect to be a meaningful part of the process.

A worthwhile playtester writes coherently. In describing the positive and negative aspects of confusions, the playtester provides the development team with options, reactions and the game's potential. To that end, the playtester must be able to describe the problem. Pointing out the issue is a part of that, but a good playtester goes beyond the level of a proofreader. The playtester is playing the game, making sense out of it, and must be able to define the problem, not just identify it.

If possible, the playtester is charged with whittling down the problem to the core. This does not mean rewriting. This can be a presentation of the argument pro and con, but more importantly, taking the problem down to the phrase or comment or word that is troublesome. Sometimes it involves the entire concept or the mechanic, and if so, then going into details is more important than reporting that "this isn't working." If the game seems smooth and well defined, but this one situation seems to create a burden, then why is it a burden? Why is it confusing? What aspect of the situation is not addressed? What can be provided to address it, or what can be removed to remedy the situation?

Hit It With a Stick

Playtesters must be the ultimate rules lawyers. By bending and stretching the rules to see what happens, challenging the game's limitations, attempting to cheat, and more than anything, striving to win, the playtester must act as the worst type of gamer and identify the weaknesses. Even the best of games have hidden options and troublesome issues of trust. Who has ever played the Avalon Hill *Civilization* board game without wondering if the lead player made a simple mathematical mistake to get so many advancements?

But a concentration on winning does not make a solid playtester. Mastering the game does not either. In fact, learning the game faster and deeper does no good if the playtester skips the nuts and bolts of the matter: detailing the obstacles, knowing what is wanted, and focusing, in turn, on all aspects of the game.

The single most important thing a playtester must do is note the obvious. Nothing can be overlooked, from typos to a lack of consistency. One of the worst things a playtester can do is assume that either a) someone else will surely see it, or b) its not that important.

Keep in mind that the root of playtesting is quality assurance. The function of the playtester is to identify potential problems, whether that problem is syntax and grammar, or a lack of clarity, detail or examples. When any playtester assumes that a word is not spelled correctly, chances are that a dozen others have made the same assumption. And they are all wrong.

I realize that many game companies will state that the playtest rules "are a work in progress." This is part and parcel of the playtest procedures. But that statement also invites an attitude that "It'll be fixed" and that mentality is bad for good playtesting. Okay, making note of every time the word "the" is spelled "teh" is a waste of everyone's time. But sometimes the wrong word, the wrong placement of a comma or the pasting of rules (in the wrong order) can make a tremendous difference in appearance.

To that end, nothing should be glossed over. For example, on the title page of the rules of the game I was working on, the name of the game was incorrect! A dozen people poured over that document, in paste-up form, but no one saw this glaring and embarrassing snafu. Did a dozen people simple ignore the mistake, or did a dozen people simply rush through the "meaningless" sections of the preparation of the rule book?

With the same game, a rather common mythical name was used, "Minotaur." However, on the playtest cards, it was listed as "Minataur." This spelling was generally considered an attempt to be unique, but when the playtest cards were matched up to lists of the cards, the inconsistency was seen and questioned. There was no attempt to be cute; it was merely a typo. Such is a perfect example of "reading too much into" the presentation of the games. Sometimes game designers and production people are trying to do things differently. Most of the time, the assumption of the playtester is incorrect.

But keep this in mind: even if the intent is there, unless the playtester addresses it, the manufacturing process, with multiple departments and various responsibilities, can be blissfully ignorant of the meaning. This can mean that the joke either went over everyone's head, or something glaringly obvious can be routed through one department after another, never raising a flag; either the primary assumption masks a mistake, or quite likely that the assumption is that the playtest process will correct all the flaws. Meanwhile, if the playtesters make the same assumption, the cycle persists and the flaw is set in publishing.

Avoiding the Link Between "U" and "Me"

The first and foremost rule in playtesting: never assume anything!

This flows into the second rule: note the obvious. The platesting process often breaks down into this flow of information: rules writing, playtesting, reporting, rewriting according to the reports, more playtesting, organizing of playtest reports, rewriting according the reports, final reviews, rewriting according to the reports, editorial process, print rules. If you assume that the rules are written front to back at every stage of the process, you are mistaken. A rules writer should, would, could, and does review the entire document many, many times, but the problem is the same problem that dogs playtesters: Assumptions are made, and things get overlooked.

The nature of the process is such that reports are often read, the sections that need addressed are rewritten or reconfigured, and the revised rules are distributed. This process is prone to the whims of the playtesters. If playtesting avoids sections of the rules, the management and rules drafters can only assume that the wording is accurate, clear and meaningful. Thus as the process continues, the design team tends to concentrate more and more on the sticky situations, and less and less time on the document as a whole. Over the course of months of time and hundreds of hours of playtesting, if sections are consistently overlooked by the playtesters, then they will be automatically overlooked in the normal process of playtesting.

At any point a playtester encounters an obstacle, he needs to figure out why there is a difficulty. Obstacles are

anything that hinders the flow of the game, from a single word to clumsily described mechanics, any parts of the rules that are not clear are not worthwhile for the product's release. Playtesting at the foremost is necessary for cleaning up the rules writing and making sure there is a flow to the game. Focusing on the why and the what is the way a good playtester addresses this aspect.

The "why" is subjective. Opinions are necessary and helpful. Perhaps the game is too similar to another. Perhaps the mindset of the gamer is too entrenched in following established patterns. Perhaps there is confusion between similar sections or contradictions implied within a page or a paragraph.

What expands upon the why. Note the specifics. Get down to the word or the phrase. Highlight the word in a quote, notate the page number (if possible) and be sure to avoid confusing the issue. If the specifics are not forthcoming, then keep it vague, but keep in mind that boiling down the specifics is the task assigned in playtesting, not just guessing and fumbling around for a explanation.

It is not recommended that the playtester outright rewrite rules. There may be a time and place for that, but never start out putting that level of input into the process. Mostly, there are people contracted to do the design, development and writing, and they are being paid to do so. So why do it for free? Also consider that reporting problems and noting difficulties are the responsibility expected from the playtesting. Trying to rewrite rules is a hopeless cause: without the benefit of the vast input and perspectives of the collected playtest materials, without direct interaction with the management and/or game design team, and without regard to the intent of the game as a whole.

What playtesting *should* provide is a combination of variables that can only be provided by experienced gamers, in the process of learning the game, and by repetitive play of the game in development. Opinions, theories, formations of styles, comparisons, observation, details, variations, and commentary are all notable expectations of the playtesters.

The ability of the playtesters to communicate these facets of the game is the most important aspect. So what should the playtester focus upon once the game has been learned and the rules reviewed for clarity, semantics, and flow? Three avenues of exploration will take the playtesters in right directions: interactivity, variation, and the spirit of the game.

Interactivity

Interactivity is the nature of all games, especially in player-to-player competition. Game design is often forged in theory and solitude. The way players actually confront the game, use its rules, and construct a style of play are not always easy to identify by the game design team. Designers can fall prey to influencing their audience, and can quickly focus upon their favorite means of playing the game. Playtesting diffuses the direct influence, and provides input from numerous points of view. It is the observation of clashing points of view and the unforeseen interactions that can either blow up the core concepts of the game design, or prove to forge a solid understanding of the game itself.

Variation

In a gaming industry dominated by chasing various deck colors and pieces of cardboard, variation has become more of a necessity for game viability. If the game cannot be played four or five different ways by a group of gamers (merely changing the size and shape of pawns no longer cuts it), then why bother? To this end, playtesting mostly assumes that different people will choose different aspects of the game play to work upon. If a game has various elements, but many are undeveloped, the playtester needs to comment and drive the development.

Spirit

One of the aspects of game development that needs commentary and opinion is the internal consistency of the game. This is often called the spirit of the game, and should be identifiable by an experienced playtester after some investment of time in the game. Rewrites of the game, and especially new additions to the mechanics, need to be in line with the expectations of the rules and the victory conditions. Nothing should stand out, whether the situation is a clash with other mechanics, a drastic imbalance in power, or something that just "doesn't feel right." Playtesters should

also hold true to the game, not the design or development team or the company itself. Being a playtester means being asked to make sure the game is worthwhile, not a popularity contest. The best playtesters are those that stubbornly maintain the integrity of the game against all other interests.

Dos and Don'ts

Ask questions: Nothing is so insightful as being able to formulate meaningful questions of the design team. Ask about the intent, the reason for changes, the meaning of word or words, the direction, the order of rules, the importance of various aspects. In terms of observation, no question can be meaningless. In fact, asking the obvious means that the obvious was assumed and not stated. This might also avoid the company's embarrassment of publishing a rulebook that contains glaring omissions.

"This game sucks!" Oh yeah? Maybe it does. But if you take playtesting seriously, you need to expand that sentiment. If you cannot, you aren't capable of the job. Many times I've seen a wretched presentation of rules and presented a commentary of a number of pages equal to, or greater than, the pages of the rules. If a playtester can hammer the details, then it's constructive criticism. If a playtester can only knee-jerk, then what's the use?

Play "mock" games: An experienced playtester can and will play two or more positions and run through the game, taking each side in turn. Hopefully, the playtester will maintain a consistent stance from each particular side, but regardless, the constant shifts in point of view are quite worthwhile to the process. Playing game after game against a set of consistent players tends to lock everyone into habits. Those habits mean that you end up playing your favorite styles and your favorite mechanics. Breaking up the patterns by forcing yourself to play all sides and confronting often overlooked cards is a fresh and jarring experience.

Presume you have the whole game: A good operation breaks up the game, doling out portions and expecting intense review by revolving the portions amongst established playtest groups. If, as a playtester, you think you know the whole picture, you probably don't. For the sake of protecting information and keeping the whole package under wraps, especially in this era of Internet driven fandom, a playtester simply cannot assume that a company would allow all the information to be concentrated and then left out of direct control.

Opinionate: Your insight is worth its weight in gold. Maintaining an objective stance on the process might be good for the blood pressure, but passion is what drives a good game, and if things are not being heard, if rewrites are making the situation worse, if the game has so much potential but so little of it being realized, then scream and shout (in writing). More than a few people are going to read your reports, and all it takes is one person who respects your opinion to either make things happen, or keep you in mind for future projects.

"This game is great!" And the point is what? Sucking up to the game designer won't win you any points if the game is an outright failure after release. If you can boil down the strong points, great! but chances are that the company, the management, the designer and the development team all already know that. The playtesters know that as well. No matter how "great" the game is, the accumulation of minor flaws can grow, the persistence of an inability to communicate the "greatness" can doom it, and the reality of one overlooked aspect can ruin the perception to others.

Think along the retail chain: The playtester's first focus is the game and the reception of the gaming community. But that community includes the industry as a whole, and the mainstream as a potential. Retailers, manufacturers and other game companies may see the game in a different light. Perhaps the concept of the game is not in the proper format. Perhaps it is unwieldy for a retailer to display. Perhaps it will impact another game company and create ill will (over some slight but significant similarity.) Perhaps a tweak in the rules, the materials or the packaging can save the company loads of money.

Questioning the publication: If the game still sucks, its time to either put up or shut up. If you absolutely know how to fix the problem, now's the time to go out on a limb and write some new rules, fix some glaring problems, or take your complaints to a higher level. What isn't cool is airing problems publicly, and especially an outright questioning of why the game is being made. Playtesting is a commitment to better the game, not to torpedo it. Constructive criticism is the way to go. Politely resigning is another option: if it's not worth the effort, don't waste your time. And don't forget

that nondisclosure agreement you probably signed to start the process.

Why Manticores Make Bad Mounts

for the *d20 System*

by Michael Tresca

In a wide variety of fantasy games, it's common for just about anything on four legs to be turned into a mount of some sort. Muscle-bound heroes ride dire tigers, dastardly villains ride dire hyenas, and armies fire arrows from elephants. But reality dictates there are certain characteristics that make animals more valuable for domestication than others.

While there are always exceptions to these rules, the qualifications of each creature ultimately dictate if it is worth the time and energy to domesticate. Some monsters are too big, others too ornery, and still others are not worth the trouble. Think having a dragon for a mount is a good idea? Read on and you might change your mind . . .

Horses are the modern equivalents of tanks in historical warfare. Their sheer power and speed turned a slow-moving armored warrior into a killing machine. The nation with mastery over cavalry is a nation who owns the battlefield. Any fantasy mount could do the same, if it meets the criteria.

Each magical beast or animal can be quantified by a variety of attributes, including alignment, breeding, diet, maturity, will save.

In addition to making the creature more or less likely as a mount, these attributes can also be used to modify the Handle Animal skills as a Domesticity Modifier. Rearing a wild animal for domestication requires a Handle Animal check (DC 15 + creature's HD). With these rules, replace the creature's HD with the Domestication Modifier, detailed below. Creatures that fit the criteria are easier to handle and groom, while those that do not are much more challenging.

Conversely, the Domesticity Modifier can be flipped to apply to Ride checks instead of the -5 applied to "creatures that are ill-suited as a mount." Thus, a +8 Domesticity Modifier added to a creature's Handle Animal DC has a -8 penalty to Ride checks.

The Domesticity Modifier can also be used to determine a druid or ranger's ability to influence animals with a Diplomacy check. Instead of the flat -4 penalty for magical beasts, use the creature's Handle Animal modifier.

Alignment

Creatures that are spirited, violent, or generally hostile to humanoids will make them less likely to be domesticated for obvious reasons. A creature's disposition varies, but its alignment is a major influence on its behavior. Creatures that are known to be aggressive (e.g., boars and predators that are the dominant hunters in their area) are also difficult to tame.

Domesticity Modifier

- **Neutral:** 0
- **Evil:** +1
- **Chaotic:** +2
- **Good:** -1
- **Lawful:** -2
- **Aggressive:** +4

Diet

Creatures need to eat. For most beasts, the ratio of food to biomass required to grow an animal to maturity is about 10 percent. Thus, it takes 10,000 pounds of grass to grow a 1,000-pound cow. If an animal is too finicky in its dietary requirements, it becomes difficult to domesticate. Creatures with limited diets can't travel far and, more importantly, can't travel with their masters. Plants are fundamentally more prevalent than other animals, so carnivores lose out in this regard. A carnivore must expend energy to pursue other prey, but grass doesn't run away from cows.

Domesticity Modifiers

- **Herbivore:** -2
- **Omnivore:** +0
- **Corpophage (corpse eater):** +1
- **Carnivore:** +2
- **Small:** -2
- **Medium:** -1
- **Large:** 0
- **Huge:** +4
- **Gargantuan:** +6
- **Colossal:** +8

Maturity

Animals that take a long time to grow to full size are less appealing. Dragons are particularly troublesome in this regard, because a human waiting for them to reach maturity might die of old age.

Of course, this growth rate ratio varies according to the race attempting to domesticate the beast. Elves may have plenty of time to wait around for a dragon to mature but half-orcs probably do not.

Domesticity Modifiers

* Divide the herder race's adulthood age by 10. This is the maximum number of years it must take for a creature to reach maturity in order for it be considered worth domesticating. For every year below that number, subtract a -1 Domesticity Modifier. For every year above that total, add a +1 Domesticity Modifier. This means that elves are willing to breed creatures that can take up to 11 years to mature, where as humans are willing to wait up to 1.5 years (the age of the average cow).

Organization

Not all animals will breed in captivity. In game terms, this is difficult to quantify, as not all descriptions quantify a particular creature as more or less likely to breed in captivity. One possible way to determine a creature's ability to breed is its numbers - creatures encountered in large numbers are more likely to breed than those that travel in groups of three.

Organizations that involve a single leader help make a creature more pliable for domestication. Herds work well because one herd member follows the next, with clear ranking throughout the herd. Herds are less like to fight as a result of this social structure and thus can coexist peacefully in restricted spaces. Packs have the same structure. Solitary animals, on the other hand, are much more territorial and will not tolerate others of their kind.

Domesticity Modifier

- Determine the maximum number of creatures likely to be encountered (under "Organization"). For every five creatures below 30 (rounded down), add a +1 Domesticity Modifier. For every five creatures over 30 (rounded down), subtract a -1 from its Domesticity Modifier.
- **Largest organization type (herd):** -4
- **Largest organization type (pack):** -2
- **Largest organization type (pair):** +1
- **Largest organization type (solitary):** +2

Will Save

A creature prone to panic can describe a variety of states, including nervousness around humanoids or single-minded attempts to escape all captivity, even if it means the death of the beast. Bison are less desirable for this reason.

Domesticity Modifier

- If the creature has a Will save over 2, decrease the Domesticity Modifier by -1. For every point of Will save under 2, increase the Domesticity Modifier by +1.

Domesticated Monsters

With these rules in mind, we can examine some popular monsters and their feasibility for domestication. Only creatures that are naturally occurring on the Prime Material plane are reviewed here, although the domestication rules can be applied to any being. Note that none of these modifiers take into account maturity, as that is determined by the race domesticating the creature.

Ankheg
Alignment: Neutral (0)
Diet: Large Carnivore (+2)
Organization: Cluster of 4 (+5)
Will Save: +2 (0)
Handle Animal DC: 22
Diplomacy/Ride Check: -7

Basilisk
Alignment: Neutral (0)
Diet: Medium Carnivore (+3)
Organization: Colony of 6 (+4)
Will Save: +3 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 21
Diplomacy/Ride Check: -6

Behir
Alignment: Neutral (0)
Diet: Huge Carnivore (+6)
Organization: Pair of 2 (+5)
Will Save: +5 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 25
Diplomacy/Ride Check: -10

Blink Dog
Alignment: Lawful Good (-3)
Diet: Medium Omnivore (-1)

Organization: Pack of 16 (+1)
Will Save: +4 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 11
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +4

Bulette
Alignment: Neutral (0)
Diet: Huge Carnivore (+6)
Organization: Pair of 2 (+5)
Will Save: +6 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 25
Diplomacy/Ride Check: -10

Chimera
Alignment: Chaotic Evil (+3)
Diet: Large Carnivore (+2)
Organization: Flight of 13 (+3)
Will Save: +6 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 22
Diplomacy/Ride Check: -7

Digester
Alignment: Aggressive Neutral (+4)
Diet: Medium Carnivore (-1)
Organization: Pack of 6 (+2)
Will Save: +3 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 19
Diplomacy/Ride Check: -4

Deinonychus
Alignment: Aggressive Neutral (+4)
Diet: Large Carnivore (+2)
Organization: Pack of 6 (+2)
Will Save: +2 (0)
Handle Animal DC: 23
Diplomacy/Ride Check: -8

Megaraptor
Alignment: Neutral Aggressive (+4)
Diet: Huge Carnivore (+6)
Organization: Pack of 6 (+2)
Will Save: +4 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 26
Diplomacy/Ride Check: -11

Triceratops
Alignment: Aggressive Neutral (+4)
Diet: Huge Herbivore (-2)
Organization: Herd of 8 (+2)
Will Save: +6 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 18
Diplomacy/Ride Check: -3

Tyrannosaurus
Alignment: Aggressive Neutral (+4)
Diet: Huge Carnivore (+6)
Organization: Pair of 2 (+5)
Will Save: +8 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 29
Diplomacy/Ride Check: -14

Dire Ape
Alignment: Aggressive Neutral (+4)
Diet: Large Omnivore (0)
Organization: Company of 8 (+4)
Will Save: +5 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 22
Diplomacy/Ride Check: -7

Dire Badger
Alignment: Aggressive Neutral (+4)
Diet: Medium Carnivore (+1)
Organization: Cete of 5 (+5)
Will Save: +4 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 24
Diplomacy/Ride Check: -9

Dire Bat
Alignment: Neutral (0)
Diet: Large Carnivore (+2)
Organization: Colony of 8 (+4)
Will Save: +6 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 20
Diplomacy/Ride Check: -5

Dire Bear
Alignment: Neutral (0)
Diet: Large Carnivore (+2)
Organization: Pair of 2 (+5)
Will Save: +6 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 21
Diplomacy/Ride Check: -6

Dire Boar
Alignment: Aggressive Neutral (+4)
Diet: Large Omnivore (0)
Organization: Herd of 8 (0)
Will Save: +8 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 18
Diplomacy/Ride Check: -3

Dire Lion
Alignment: Neutral (0)
Diet: Large Carnivore (+2)
Organization: Pride of 10 (+4)
Will Save: +7 (-1)

Handle Animal DC: 20
Diplomacy/Ride Check: -5

Dire Rat
Alignment: Neutral (0)
Diet: Small Omnivore (-2)
Organization: Pack of 20 (-1)
Will Save: +3 (-1)

Handle Animal DC: 11
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +4

Dire Tiger
Alignment: Neutral (0)
Diet: Aggressive Large Carnivore (+6)
Organization: Pair of 2 (+5)
Will Save: +11 (-1)

Handle Animal DC: 25
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +10

Dire Weasel
Alignment: Neutral (0)
Diet: Aggressive Medium Carnivore (+5)
Organization: Pair of 2 (+5)
Will Save: +4 (-1)

Handle Animal DC: 24
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +9

Dire Wolf
Alignment: Neutral (0)
Diet: Aggressive Large Carnivore (+6)
Organization: Pack of 8 (+2)
Will Save: +4 (-1)

Handle Animal DC: 23
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +8

Dire Wolverine
Alignment: Neutral (0)
Diet: Aggressive Large Carnivore (+6)
Organization: Pair of 2 (+5)
Will Save: +5 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 25
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +5

Dragon
Dragons will vary greatly depending on the size and age of the dragon in question. The majority of evil dragons are considered aggressive and all dragons are omnivores.

Draggone

Alignment: Neutral (0)
Diet: Large Carnivore (+4)
Organization: Pride of 10 (+4)
Will Save: +4 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 22
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +7

Eagle, Giant
Alignment: Neutral Good (-1)
Diet: Large Carnivore (+2)
Organization: Eyrie of 12 (+3)
Will Save: +3 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 18
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +3

Frost Worm
Alignment: Neutral (0)
Diet: Huge Carnivore (+6)
Organization: Solitary (+6)
Will Save: +6 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 26
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +11

Gorgon
Alignment: Aggressive Neutral (+4)
Diet: Large Herbivore (-2)
Organization: Herd of 13 (+3)
Will Save: +5 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 19
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +4

Griffon
Alignment: Aggressive Neutral (+4)
Diet: Large Carnivore (+2)
Organization: Pride of 10 (+4)
Will Save: +5 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 24
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +9

Hippogriff
Alignment: Aggressive Neutral (+4)
Diet: Large Omnivore (0)
Organization: Flight of 12 (+3)
Will Save: +2 (0)
Handle Animal DC: 22
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +7

Hydra
Alignment: Aggressive Neutral (+4)
Diet: Huge Carnivore (+6)
Organization: Solitary (+5)
Will Save: +3 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 29

Diplomacy/Ride Check: +14

Krenshar
Alignment: Neutral (0)
Diet: Medium Carnivore (+2)
Organization: Pride of 10 (+4)
Will Save: +1 (+1)
Handle Animal DC: 22
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +7

Lammasu
Alignment: Lawful Good (-3)
Diet: Large Omnivore (0)
Organization: Solitary (+4)
Will Save: +7 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 15
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +0

Manticore
Alignment: Lawful Evil (-1)
Diet: Aggressive Large Carnivore (+6)
Organization: Pride of 6 (+4)
Will Save: +7 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 23
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +8

Owl, Giant
Alignment: Neutral Good (-1)
Diet: Large Carnivore (+2)
Organization: Company of 5 (+5)
Will Save: +3 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 20
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +5

Pegasus
Alignment: Chaotic Good (+1)
Diet: Large Herbivore (-2)
Organization: Herd of 10 (0)
Will Save: +4 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 15
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +0

Purple Worm
Alignment: Aggressive Neutral (+2)
Diet: Gargantuan Omnivore (+6)
Organization: Solitary (+5)
Will Save: +4 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 28
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +13

Remorhaz
Alignment: Aggressive Neutral (+2)
Diet: Huge Carnivore (+6)

Organization: Solitary (+5)
Will Save: +3 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 27
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +12

Roc
Alignment: Neutral (0)
Diet: Gargantuan Carnivore (+8)
Organization: Pair of 2 (+5)
Will Save: +9 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 27
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +12

Androsphinx
Alignment: Chaotic Good (+1)
Diet: Large Carnivore (+2)
Organization: Solitary (+5)
Will Save: >+2 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 22
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +7

Criosphinx
Alignment: Neutral (0)
Diet: Large Carnivore (+2)
Organization: Solitary (+5)
Will Save: >+2 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 21
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +6

Gynosphinx
Alignment: Neutral (0)
Diet: Large Carnivore (+2)
Organization: Solitary (+5)
Will Save: >+2 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 22
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +6

Hieracosphinx
Alignment: Chaotic Evil (+3)
Diet: Large Carnivore (+2)
Organization: Solitary (+5)
Will Save: >+2 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 24
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +9

Spider Eater
Alignment: Aggressive Neutral (+4)
Diet: Large Carnivore (+2)
Organization: Solitary (+5)
Will Save: +2 (0)
Handle Animal DC: 26
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +11

Unicorn
Alignment: Chaotic Good (+1)
Diet: Large Herbivore (-2)
Organization: Grace of 6 (+4)
Will Save: >+2 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 17
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +2

Winter Wolf
Alignment: Neutral Evil (+1)
Diet: Large Carnivore (+2)
Organization: Pack of 5 (+5)
Will Save: >+2 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 22
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +7

Worg
Alignment: Neutral Evil (+1)
Diet: Large Carnivore (+2)
Organization: Pack of 11 (+3)
Will Save: >+2 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 20
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +5

Wyvern
Alignment: Aggressive Neutral (+4)
Diet: Large Carnivore (+2)
Organization: Flight of 6 (+4)
Will Save: >+2 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 24
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +9

Yrthak
Alignment: Aggressive Neutral (+4)
Diet: Large Carnivore (+2)
Organization: Clutch of 4 (+5)
Will Save: >+2 (-1)
Handle Animal DC: 25
Diplomacy/Ride Check: +10

Pedaling to the Clouds

for *GURPS*

by R. West

Throughout the modern era, human beings (and many others) have enjoyed the pleasures of a simple journey under their own power: bicycling, rowing a boat, hiking, and similar forms of recreation. In a high tech society, there's no reason that this would change, although the vehicles might. By TL12, contragrav is reasonably inexpensive, and can be turned to recreational use. The Gaelic Enterprises "Revolution" presented here is once such recreational vehicle. Using a low-powered contragrav generator and advanced fuel cells to power it (and any electronics), the propulsion is generated solely by the rider's pedaling a ducted airscrew.

A *GURPS Vehicle Builder* file for this article is available HERE.

The "Revolution" was one of the first mass market air bikes produced, hence its name, showing that it's intended to revolutionize outdoor recreation and exercise. The bike is just over four feet long, and narrow enough to allow for comfortable riding, with a shrouded airscrew in the rear. There are two cycle seats, but, on the basic model, only the front seat has pedals or controls.

On many worlds, the cycle doesn't require the vast array of electronics and safety features that powered contragrav vehicles must carry. This is because it is a human propelled recreational vehicle, rather than a grav car. (This is similar to the difference between 20th-century Earth's differing regulations for automobiles and bicycles.) The .075 cubic foot electronics bay allows the easy addition of a transponder, with room for extras as a stereo system for the musically inclined rider. The contra-grav unit is overpowered by 25% for safety.

The computer is a small, unsophisticated, and cheap model, but easily upgraded if needed. No software is provided, and there is no terminal, only an access port for a rider's portable computer.

The muscle engine and airscrew are capable of handling riders with a Strength of 20, although the performance stats provided are for a rider with a Strength of 10. The effects of higher strength are delineated in the vehicle statistics.

TL 12 Contragrav bicycle

Crew: 1 total. 1 crew station covering vehicle maneuvering system, communicator, 2 navigation aids. 1 passenger.

Subassemblies: Vehicle -1, Body -1.

P&P: muscle engine (1-man, avg. ST: 20, no access space), 46,000-kWs rechargeable power cell, 0.4-kW ducted fan (no access space), 625 lbs. lift contragrav generator.

Fuel: None.

Occ: cycle crew station, cycle passenger seat Cargo: 0.075-cf Electronics Bay, 0.5-cf cargo hold

Armor F RL B T U
Body   3/5 3/5 3/5 3/5 3/5

Equipment

Body: medium range radio communicator (5,000-mile range); GPS; inertial compass; small computer (complexity 5;

dumb).

Statistics

Size: [L×W×H] 5'×0.2'×1.3' **Payload:** 412 lbs. **Lwt.:** 466 lbs.
Volume: 1.38 cf **Maint.:** 222 hours (0.433 mh/day) **Price:** $2,036

HT: 9 **HP:** 11 [Body].

Aerial Performance: Stall Speed 0 mph, Drag 4.52, Top Speed 35 mph with strength 10, aAccel 0.07 mph/s, aMR 7, aSR 3, aDecel 30 mph/s.

Additional strength within the capabilities of the muscle engine adds speed as follows:

- Strength 11 allows a speed of 40 mph.
- Strength 14 allows a speed of 45 mph.
- Strength 17 and higher allows a speed of 50 mph.

Design Notes:

- TL12 medium frame standard materials [Vehicle].TL12 DR 5 standard metal [Vehicle].
- Operating Duration: 20 H 5 M 27 S.
- Vehicle Features: electronic controls, fair streamlining, cheaply made.
- Volume: 1.38 cf [Body].
- Area: 7.44 sf [Body].
- Aerial Performance: external item drag 1, payload 0, sweep none.

Other models are lighter in weight, and better streamlined; most of these are hideously expensive racing machines. Others, intended for longer-distance recreational activity, have a larger contragrav unit and a hardpoint, allowing additional cargo to be carried externally. Campers can then carry a tent, provisions, and a solar cell for recharging. Higher end models also need less maintenance; the basic "Revolution" is cheaply made, but requires only infrequent tune-ups regardless.

Uses

- "Revolution" airbikes have very little EM emissions, and so would be ideal for sneaking into any place the player characters would not be welcome. A simple EM Emissions mask would reduce the already low signature. The craft is ideal for low, under the radar, travelling into places that do not welcome guests.
- A collection of airbikes could also be the only available transportation on an extended journey . . . or at least the only transportation the group can afford.
- These and similar vehicles are common sites in some hi-tech worlds.

Pyramid Review

Legacies of the Renaissance (for *Call of Cthulhu*)

Published by [Chaosium, Inc.](#)

Written by Alan Kissane & Dr. Robert Francis

62-page tape-bound b&w softcover; $15

Legacies of the Renaissance is a scenario for [*Call of Cthulhu*](#) set firmly in the game's classic period of the 1920s. It has been released as part of Chaosium's Miskatonic University Library Association series of Monographs, and is only available direct from the publisher's website. All entries in the series are considered to be of special interest by Chaosium, popular enough to be made available, but the publisher leaves the production values, layout, and editing up to the authors. The intent is that, should any one title prove popular enough, it will undergo proper editing and be released via the normal distribution channels. To date, with over 20 Monographs published, for the *Basic Role Play System* and *Stormbringer* as well as *Call of Cthulhu,* none seems to have proved popular enough.

Legacies of the Renaissance is actually the first of a trilogy set in the late 1920s dealing with Mythos-related artifacts and events that are still having an effect centuries after they first came to prominence. For this scenario, subtitled *The Stone of Concordance,* the strange artifact is a piece of jewelry, said to have links to England's foremost alchemist and astrologer of the 16th century, and the leading romance poets of the early 19th. The scenario will see the investigators blackmailed into traveling from England across Europe and back again by a desperate man. Only by making this journey will they save the lives of their friends and reveal both the true nature and the dark history of the stone.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The scenario opens in 1928 with a telegram from a friend of the investigators, one William Tanislow, asking for their help. His future father-in-law, the British Foreign Minister Wilfred Forbes, has been murdered, and his fiancée Valerie is missing. Coming to his aid, William further reveals that she is still alive, but for some reason remains in hiding, and that he possesses little faith in the police investigation. This is the beginning of a trail that leads the characters through the foggy streets of London, hampered by a police inspector who objects to amateur interference, and monitored by at least one individual of a murderous bent. As the investigation pulls them into the histories of Doctor John Dee, the artist Godfrey Kneller, and Lord Byron, the characters must visit in turn, the British Museum, the dark allies of Soho, and West Minster Abbey, before going North to Nottingham, and Lord Byron's last resting place.

Researches reveal that the Stone of Concordance consists of two halves, and that one half is missing. To locate it, the second half of the scenario takes the investigators across Europe to Venice -- via the Simplon-Orient Express, no less -- and from there over the Aegean to Crete. Just off the island's coast is another smaller island, once a refuge for incapacitated soldiers during the Greek war of independence, and now a Leper colony. This is the last known location of the person who owned the missing half. Actually finding the missing half is not that difficult, but obtaining it is, as a pestilent avatar of a Great Old One protects it. Once in their hands, it is a simple matter of returning to England to face the blackmailer and free the hostages.

Legacies of the Renaissance is heavily plotted and certainly gives plenty for the investigators to do. That said, in places it is overly plotted. What is revealed over the course of the scenario is that the Stone of Concordance was created through a ritual that the investigators are encouraged to perform in order to gain more information. The problem here is that would an experienced group of players have their investigators perform such a ritual? There is also the matter of the exhumation of Lord Byron's burial vault, an event that did not actually take place until 1934. The characters have to be present in order to obtain vital information, but what happens if they are unable to be there?

Neither eventuality is really addressed in the scenario, but an experienced Keeper should be able to handle such a problem. Thankfully, other scenes are less heavy handed, and are more effective at moving the adventure along.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The scenario has a few requirements. First it is not designed for inexperienced characters, who need some Mythos knowledge. That, and knowledge of several languages. Not just the traditional Latin, but also some German, and perhaps a little Greek and Italian. The time and place is also quite specific: England in 1928. There are notes included on Great Britain during this period, but access to either ***Green & Pleasant Land*** or ***The London Guidebook*** would prove useful. Taking the adventure out of the 1920s would be difficult due to historical constraints, but with a tweak here and there, it could be run in the 1890s of ***Cthulhu By Gaslight.*** Running ***Legacies of the Renaissance*** in the modern era is more problematic and a doubtful prospect.

Physically, this Monograph is up to the standards of the series. Naturally it requires a further edit, but it is illustrated with a reasonable selection of period photographs and serviceable maps. In places the writing does not flow as willingly as one would hope, but this is only a small hurdle to overcome.

Like the majority of the Monographs released to date, ***Legacies of the Renaissance*** needs some development. In this case to make the Keeper's task easier and the scenario smoother to run. What problems it has are relatively easy to overcome, particularly for the experienced Keeper. Where the scenario shines is in the plotting and in showcasing the depth of the authors' research, as evidenced by the bibliography. It also contains links to the second adventure in the trilogy, set in Venice following the uncovering of the bones of a new dinosaur species during a canal cleaning. If the authors can work in a little more flexibility into the writing, this first scenario bodes well for the sequels. If that fails to appear, then ***Legacies of the Renaissance*** is at least solid support for a British-based ***Call of Cthulhu*** campaign.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Blood Mansion CD

Published by [Midnight Cathedral](#)

Audio CD, 13 tracks, 38 minutes; $12

It still seems there isn't enough game-specific music to set the mood. *Blood Mansion* tries hard, and succeeds to an extent, though even it has too much variation to fit its own themes comfortably, never mind being a perfect accompaniment to your game.

The back-story to the score is the old Hodges mansion. Originally a plantation in the South, the property's owner had a liberal view of slaves' rights that made him popular among his staff. This loyalty left his lands mostly untouched by Sherman on his march through Georgia -- the occupants stood together to protect it. Carpetbaggers attempted a takeover during Reconstruction, and John Hodges and his workers were mysteriously butchered when they refused all offers. Through the last 140 years it has repelled several potential owners, and the massacre has passed into legend. Now it has a soundtrack.

The first track, "Oooh Choir," drones a bit, but its slow tempo and unremarkable nature makes a good lead-in to the dramatic or creepy (it's oddly good for denouement, too). "Cemetery Talk" also has few highs and lows and fits slow action better, like investigation, while "Night Terror" suits level action: pursuit, or cruising the mean streets. It has the distant suggestion of something feral, too, so that's handy. When everyone sickens of "Cemetery"'s one-minute repetitions (about the third go-round), they'll welcome this.

"Midnight Cathedral" (we have a title!) is a meandering journey on which even the artist seems lost. Tinkling strains of "Rock-a-Bye Baby," followed by tolling church bells, let a choir take over. It's the sort of Peer-Gynt chorus that says the Prince of Lies (or his daughter) is about to get screen-time, though it's not as sonorous or terrifying even with ravens and more storms to end it. With everything up to and including the dongs of a broken calliope, this seven-minute opus never quite settles into a single groove. By contrast, "Ghost Story" is about 30 seconds -- this one plays you out to commercial break after something creepy occurs. It's good, though, so put that on repeat too for those moments of revelation.

Every story has that scene where some wizened old hag tells everyone her hideous life story, full of tragic lost love, and that's where "Haunted Piano" comes in. Play this as you narrate to the players and they'll know the next scene involves a doll with life-like eyes killing them in their sleep. It's easily the most effective piece on the disc.

"Echoes Downward" reverberates through sewers and tunnels. Something big hums in the background, so be sure the PCs have stumbled onto the government's Area 51 project when you cue it. It suits cyberpunk better than horror with its vaguely alien lasers or scratchings (it doesn't fade, though, it just cuts out -- careful you don't spoil the mood). Once they've found the secret, "The Abyss" means they've been discovered…there's not so much music here as a cacophony of sound collapsing around them, so torture someone for effect. It's a Saturday night gone south, so if the torment is in Hell's mosh pit all the better. The DJ must've died, because "Bass Ackward" sounds like a scratch session cut short (that, or it's a faulty copy of the album). The reversed music (get it?) might be nice for time travel or warping reality.

The titles then become a bit more baffling. A needless pairing of Bobby McFerrin mouth pops and the vibrating whistle of a UFO landing in 1950 somehow gets named "Voodoo Call" -- use the first part for your early 80s crime dramas. The second half, you get the feeling you're traveling with the same thumps and hums as when the Terminator grabs John Connor. The cyber-future of the autobahn or subway would be well represented by this track. Voodoo doesn't enter into it.

Someone goes over the edge in "Cliff House": Your story has been told and someone must perish in positively Dickensian fashion (you can feel the water below beckon to you). Good stuff, but like "Haunted Piano," it demands the right moment. Once you've plummeted into the drink, the "Sea at Night" fails to give up its dead and the camera and the stringed instruments pull back rapidly across the waves. Good for foot pursuits, trips to the next destination, and the not-quite-shaking of the feeling of being followed. "Til' Next Time": more thunder, more piano, and a creepy laugh that's, sadly, not at all subtle. It's lightweight electronica, as though the piano was replaced at the last moment to finish the score. It, too, ends abruptly.

Some tracks are so long as to be intolerable, others so short as to add doubt to the merits of their inclusion. The work shows the telltale signs of independent production -- murky printing, spelling errors in the jacket, and grainy shots for the cover -- but the music itself is competently produced and the price isn't bad. It's inconvenient to have titles on the disc itself (print them from the website or pop the drive to read them), it's not as smooth as similar offerings, and a lot of it sounds awfully alike. It isn't dedicated music like a **Deadlands** collection (it has its own story to tell), so it may serve several games only in part. There's enough incongruity to keep it from being all things to any one genre (including its own tale), but it shows enough depth of composition to beat out those haunted house soundtracks. Used properly, **Blood Mansion** can be a positive boon to your more dramatic or morbid roleplaying sessions.

--Andy Vetromile

Lamia: You've Got Me On My Knees

"Her head was serpent, but ah, bitter-sweet!
She had a woman's mouth with all its pearls complete:
And for her eyes: what could such eyes do there
But weep, and weep, that they were born so fair?"
-- John Keats, "Lamia," I:59-62

This is a story about a monster, one we've met before, or at least named before. Actually, it's two stories, at least, and perhaps two monsters, though two with the same name. One story's reflection becomes the other story's concern, twisted like the serpent and mirrored like an eye. It's hard to follow the trail, twisting back as it does, ducking underwater and splitting its tracks in a sinuous maze, the monster all the while watching for her chance. Blink, and you'll miss it -- don't blink, and, well -- that's the story. One of them, anyway.

"The maid, alas! Her thoughts are gone,
She nothing sees -- no sight but one!
The maid, devoid of guile and sin,
I know not how, in fearful wise,
So deeply had she drunken in
That look, those shrunken serpent eyes,
That all her features were resigned
To this sole image in her mind . . ."
-- Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Christabel"

Once upon a time, Joan went to visit her friend Betty and her husband Tom, to see if they would go Christmas shopping at Penzance. As she approached their house, she spied through the window and saw Betty smearing Tom's eyes with an ointment, so that they shone like dark stars. As she knocked, she heard a sound as of something being quickly hidden, and then Betty came to the door. Joan explained her errand, and Betty demurred, saying she and Tom were unwell, and were staying indoors that night. But Betty went to get Joan a refreshing drop to warm her.

While Betty was gone, Joan found the ointment box where it had been hastily put aside. Joan rubbed a little ointment on her right eye, and could see nothing but tears for a while. She barely hid the box again before Betty returned with her drink, and the two friends chatted for awhile. Finally, Joan left and did her shopping at Penzance. While at the market, she noticed that her right eye saw goblins and boggarts stealing from the stalls, but her left eye saw nothing unusual. The ointment, it seemed, had granted fairy-sight! On the way back to her own house that night, Joan met a richly dressed lady of noble carriage and haughty mien in the road. Being well brought up, she curtsied, and the strange lady stopped, evidently shocked at the attention. "What eye did you see me with?" the woman asked. Frightened, she gasped, "With my right eye, ma'am." And with that, the lady reached over and plucked Joan's right eye out, and Joan never saw a fairy again.

"These [Dracs], they say, have their abode in the caverns of rivers, and occasionally, floating along the stream in the form of gold rings or cups, entice women or boys who are bathing on the banks of the river; for, while they endeavour to grasp what they see, they are suddenly seized and dragged down to the bottom: and this, they say, happens to none more than to suckling women, who are taken by the Dracs to rear their unlucky offspring; and sometimes, after they have spent seven years there, they return to our hemisphere."
-- Gervase of Tilbury, *Otis Imperialia*

This story is my recollection of the fairy tale "How Joan Lost Her Sight In One Eye," which I read long ago in some anthology or other. Upon beginning the research for this column, I discovered a slightly different version, collected from Cornwall in 1870. An earlier version is called "The Fairy Ointment," and it comes from a late-18th century Welsh story called "The Midwife to the Fairies." In this story, "Joan" is an old woman brought in to midwife a fairy birth. The fairies give her an ointment to anoint the baby's eyes, and she accidentally gets some in her own eye, with the eventual gruesome consequences. An Irish version, collected in 1844 (so likely at least as old as "The Midwife to

the Fairies") is called "The Fairy Nurse," about a woman kidnapped to wet-nurse the fairy child. Which, as it happens, is the version told to Gervase of Tilbury, the Marshal of Arles, who wrote it down in 1214 as eyewitness testimony to the habits of the Dracae, or Dracs.

What are Dracs? Per Gervase, the Drac is a shapeshifter, so the answer may be unclear. *Drac* is simply the Occitan word for "dragon," and to this day there is a Fête de la Drac in Beaucaire, France on the Rhône River opposite Tarascon. That's right, we have yet another serpentine monster in that particularly haunted stretch of river, to go with the [Tarrasque](#) and the [Vouivre](#). Like dragons, the Drac are associated with gold, even -- shades of Fafnir -- shifting into a golden Ring to tempt women by the river. Like water-fairies such as Peg Powler and Jenny Greenteeth, the Dracs live underwater and snatch people -- though Gervase claims that they prefer nursing mothers to young children. An interesting reversal of form, but as Diane Purkiss notes in *Troublesome Things,* there is perhaps only a river's surface of difference between a monster that preys on nursing mothers directly and one that preys on their children.

"They become such fables as nurses used to tell to children, both to frighten them into good behaviour and also to entertain them. . . . It was told that Lamia was a queen and ruled in Libya. Her cave was actually pointed out to visitors."
-- Karl Kerényi, *Gods of the Greeks*

So we're already tangled in a web of story, with at least three or four strands and any number of loose ends. Let's see what we can do to re-knit them. We need a child-stealing monster, ideally serpentine, strongly identified with eyes. Where do we find such a thing? In ancient Greece, as it happens, going under the name Lamia. The story of Lamia goes like this: Zeus fell in love with Lamia, queen of Libya, and had many children by her. But Hera, jealous, killed all of Lamia's children until Lamia was driven mad with grief. Hera further cursed Lamia with the inability to close her eyes, so that she could never sleep and forget her loss. Hence, Lamia roamed the earth by night, stealing other mothers' children and howling in pain. (The parallels with [La Llorona](#), who cries by water for her lost children, are self-evident.) Plutarch adds the odd detail that Lamia had the ability to remove her own eyes (possibly a merciful gift from Zeus) and replace them with others -- and in later stories, those eyes were freshly harvested from those unlucky enough to encounter her.

Lamia's snake form isn't mentioned in the earliest myths (Stesichoros merely names her the mother of the sea-monster Scylla) although she is often identified with Oinopole, "the one-legged" -- a description of a snake, sure enough. (This eventually becomes *onokle* -- "ass-legged," which reminds us of the hairy legs of the [Queen of Sheba](#).) The name *Lamia* means "shark," or "flatfish," possibly deriving from *laimos,* or "gullet." (There may also be a connection with Lamos, the king of the Laestrygonians, the cannibal giants of the *Odyssey.*) Again, here Lamia branches. If she's an archaic Greek coastal deity, she may descend from the [Snake Goddess](#) of Crete. On the other hand, if she's an import from the East (again, like the Queen of Sheba), her name may be a back-formation from Lamashtu, a Babylonian goddess who preyed on -- nursing mothers! Lamashtu gave [poisoned milk](#), and kidnapped children from their mothers, and killed them in their cribs. In favor of an Eastern heritage for Lamia are her depiction with a lion's head in some art (just as Lamashtu wears) and her descent from "Belos" in a later version of the story, Belos being the Greek version of the Semitic Baal, or Bel. And, of course, there's the fact that Lamia told her boyfriend she was from Phoenicia.

"[I]t was a woman who clasped his hand and declared that she had been long in love with him, and that she was a Phoenician woman and lived in a suburb of Korinthos, and she mentioned the name of the particular suburb, and said: 'When you reach the place this evening, you will hear my voice as I sing to you, and you shall have wine such as you never before drank, and there will be no rival to disturb you; and we two beautiful beings will live together.'"
-- Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*

Here's another story, from roughly 215 A.D. Menippus, a young philosopher in Corinth, meets a beautiful Phoenician girl and goes home with her night after night. Eventually, he meets the magus and philosopher Apollonius of Tyana, who suspects something amiss and tricks Menippus into proposing marriage to the girl. At the marriage feast, held at the girl's mansion, Apollonius shows up uninvited and identifies the girl as one of the "lamiae," at which point the entire house and its treasure vanishes, and the lamia (for so she is) is driven out of Corinth in defeat.

Our Lamia has become patron and namesake of the *lamiae,* a race of ghostly women who aim for something a little

meatier than children or even nursing mothers. The lamiae are essentially succubi, who seduce and devour men. Like Antony's Cleopatra, they live in Egypt (near Lamia's old Libyan slithering grounds) or similar foreign parts, and set their eyes on young men traveling or sleeping alone. Lamia has branched on us once more. By the fourth century B.C., Lamia is both a child-eating ogress and a byword for "prostitute," used as a joke by Aristophanes. By the late classical era, the lamiae are part ghost, part vampire, part serpent, and part seductress. The translators of the Vulgate Bible used *lamia* to translate "Lilith," in Isaiah 34:14, which brings yet another Middle Eastern demoness into things. And our old friend Gervase of Tilbury identifies the lamiae with *mascae,* or night-mares. (Which is to say, succubi without the fun part -- they just crush your chest, like a constricting snake.) By 1430, Nicolas of Jauer resolves the contradiction -- lamiae are night-hag succubus demons in the shape of witches, who steal children and roast them over fires.

"She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,
Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;
Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,
Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barr'd;
And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,
Dissolv'd, or brighter shone, or interwreathed
Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries --
So rainbow-sided, touch'd with miseries,
She seem'd, at once, some penanced lady elf,
Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self."
-- John Keats, "Lamia," I:47-56

But there's yet more to Lamia. Pausanias notes that Lamia is one of the Sibyls, a prophetic demigoddess -- specifically the Sibyl of Libya. And what do we call the priestess of the Sibylline oracle? The Pythia, which is to say, the "pythoness." The snake-woman, who lives in a cave and sees the future with her glittering, never-closed eye. (Another Sibyl was Delphine, who explicitly had the body of a snake. Or maybe a dolphin.) The Lamia now draws men in, not with the promise of sex, but with the promise of knowledge. The gift she offers is that of the Sirens -- listen, and learn. Here we glimpse the "artistic Lamia," the Lamia of Inspiration celebrated by Keats, and combined by him with Apollonius' succubus and given the eye of the child-stealer. Keats' bargain (sealed in blood?) allows him to represent the Lamia in all her forms at once, a chaotic panoply of story and color (check out that nonlinear description above) who transforms from glory to serpent to faerie to woman and back again. The Lamia is bisociation given form, learning by pulling out your eyes and looking from new angles.

"Shut, shut those juggling eyes, thou ruthless man!
Turn them aside, wretch! or the righteous ban
Of all the Gods, whose dreadful images
Here represent their shadowy presences,
May pierce them on the sudden with the thorn
Of painful blindness; leaving thee forlorn."
-- John Keats, "Lamia," II:277-282

Once we've come this far, we see traces of Lamia everywhere, out of the corners of our eyes. Her widely separated coils emerge from the underground stream of legend. There is a Chinese legend of "The Confucian and the Snake Woman" that might well be Apollonius revived at the other end of the Silk Road. (Which has its own one-legged monster defeated by Apollonius, as we saw.) There is the Malayan langsuir, and the Basque lamiak, both child-stealing monster women, neither with a clear linguistic connection to either Greek or Babylonian. There are snakes and eyes and women in the form of the Gorgons, who we shall have to visit in another column. There is Lady Godiva, beautiful and naked beneath her shining coils of hair, who struck blind the man who saw her. There is Schliemann's quest for "flashing-eyed Athene" and the Trojan humiliation of the women of Locris (which, as it happened, also had a temple to Lamia). Lamia is all around us, drinking blood and poisoning artists and stealing children and offering her serpentine wisdom. Only Apollonius of Tyana can defeat her, by looking straight at her and resolving her contradictions with the light of pure reason, of cold philosophy, of boring reality. So look deep into the eyes of the Lamia -- and whatever you do, don't tell her which eye you see her with.

Things I Love as a Player (GM Edition)

And this week finishes up the now-eight-part series covering love-hate-GM-player interactions. In case the H1 header above this paragraph wasn't a big enough clue, this week's column is about things I love as a player from my GM.

Unfortunately, this has proven something of a challenging column. After all, most of the things I love as a player tend to break down into three categories: Things that exist as the flip side of stuff I've already written about ("GMs who use my character background info for plots"), things that are too self-aggrandizing ("I like GMs who GM like I GM"), and things that are too silly obvious ("I like GMs who give me large sacks of cash").

Fortunately, I'm paid the big bucks to rise above my limitations, and so I've come up with three that should fit the bill.

* * *

GMs who are better prepared than I am. In the past I've shared my campaign notes (or lack thereof). In that same article, I mentioned the amazed awe I held for one GM, whose preperation had led him to outline entire cities we hadn't visited, on the off-chance that we dropped by those areas.

Other GMs have gone to similar lengths, pulling crazy stunts like actually *reading* the books or coming up with stats ahead of time. Although I'm proof positive that it's not necessary to do a lick of work in order to run an adventure folks enjoy, it's certainly one of those things that seems like it *should* be done. After all, one of the downsides of the GM making up everything on the spot is that some plot points or happenings can seem awfully arbitrary:

GM: Uhhh . . . okay. You're walking along a dungeon corridor, and you see exits to the left or right. Which way do you want to go?
Player: Let's go left.
GM: Okie-doke. You encounter an old man who says, "I need you to locate my daughter; she is lost somewhere on the west side of the dungeon."
Player: Uh-huh. And what would've happened if I'd said "Let's go right"?
GM: Same thing . . . only I would've said she's lost on the east side.

I respect GMs who are able to build enough of a game world to ensure that the feeling of freedom -- one of the key draws of tabletop RPGs -- opens the possibilities of adventure, rather than feeling like you're going to tip over the facade sets at any moment.

GMs who mix things up. I don't have much to say here, except that it's very easy for GMs in most games to fall into ruts. Some of these are intrinsic to the genre or campaign style -- such as a dungeon-crawl campaign that dares to have a dungeon crawl -- but sometimes it's just a side effect of getting "stuck" at some point. For example, my female protagonists tend to be wise-cracking super-competent gals. (Curiously, my NPCs of all stripes generally have about a 90% chance of being wise-acres.) For a while, about half my plots revolved around the seemingly innocent minor character rising up to be revealed as the ultimate threat. And so on.

Good GMs are able to recognize their own tendency to repeat themselves, and take steps to shake the snowglobe a bit more vigorously. After all, while there's a certain amount of comfort in knowing that some elements of an adventure will be the same (there will probably be combat in many campaigns, for example), I suspect a fair bit of the appeal for many gamers is the sense of discovery, of the feeling of something new that might lurk around any corner. And, for me, I'm always much more interested in that Something New if I know it's nothing going to be just another iteration of Same Old, Same Old.

GMs who maintain the pace of the game. I'm guessing it's happened to most roleplaying gamers. The players and GM are all really into the game; the action's unfolding like the best movies or novels. The decision to use a skill to unlock the door results in a fast dice roll, enabling everyone to do the light banter that would normally be in such a scene: "We've got to get through there before the Stormnazis get is!" or the like. Players are interacting in character,

and things are great.

And then something happens that brings the entire flow of the game to screeching halt, as if the game's tracks had been laid out by Wile E. Coyote to lead right into the side of the mountain, and no one had the foresight to bring along a canister of Tunnel Paint.

In my experience, this problem with pacing can almost always be laid at the feet of combat; what would last a few minutes in a movie or a few pages in a book becomes an hour-long test of endurance. Part of this is the nature of the beast; most combat rounds are in the one- to 10-second range, all players (and the NPCs) get a chance to act (which will usually take at least 30 to 60 seconds), and combats generally last five to 10 rounds. Run those numbers through our [LEGO difference engine](), and we discover that a minute of in-game time can easily last an hour.

While such an elongation of time might be a natural side effect of combat, it can also have serious implications on everyone's fun. After all, if the bomb is set to go off in 30 seconds, or if an important character is bleeding to death, then it can be tough to remind folks of the impending gravity of the situation: "Okay; the villain released the deadman's switch on the nuclear device 45 minutes ago . . . is everyone still awake enough to respond?" (Admittedly, anyone who's ever watched a close American football game will be used to this phenomenon, since those last "two minutes" of gameplay are usually enough to raise a generation of lab rats from birth to venerable death, with 20 seconds to spare.)

But some GMs are better than others at keeping the pace strong and minimizing the jarring decompression of time; they prod along the slow players, respond quickly to even the most complex actions, and keep that bomb ticking. Curiously, I've seen at least three approaches to doing this well (with the possibility of overlap). First, some GMs just have a good enough handle on the rules to eliminate the uncertainty and time-sink that comes with needing to look up everything. Second, some GMs are good enough to "wing it," coming up with modifiers, decisions, and even systems that will work at least for the situation at hand. Finally, some GMs neatly sidestep this issue *before* the game even begins, by either choosing systems they can keep going at a rapid-pace, or by streamlining existing systems with enough house rules or modifications to speed things up. (One such example -- chosen at random from a pile of pulsing neurons -- is long-time-Pyramidian Bob Portnell's ***[EZFudge]()*** adaptation of the *Fudge* rules.)

Pacing is one of the most important jobs a GM has. If you keep the pace fast enough, your audience will forgive a *lot* of mistakes and creative sins; just witness the writings of Dan Brown . . . ideally through a piece of pinhole-poked cardboard, if your eyes are especially sensitive. And my hat's off to any GM who handles the job well.

* * *

Okay; I think that should well and truly wrap up this series for now. I won't say "for good," because who knows when next I'll be looking for some glue to bind together a random list of pet peeves or personal passions? In the meantime, feel free to offer your thoughts via [e-mail]() or over on the [discussion boards]().

--Steven Marsh

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Modifying Enchantments

for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Demi Benson

"Did you find the famous enchanter you were looking for?" asked Meirkar.

"Oh, yes!" said Vahri, "You should see the devices he makes -- a magic cloak to keep the rain off, a fire-starting wand . . ."

"A normal cloak will keep the rain off, and I've seen dozens of fire-starting wands. There's nothing special about them."

Vahri gave her friend a piqued look, "But these were cheaper than any I've seen. Cheap enough for a tradesman to buy. Cheap enough that I bought a fire-starter on a whim. I don't know what this enchanter's secret is, but I bet the Mage's Guild would kill to find out."

* * *

The enchantment system as described in the *GURPS Basic Set* and *Magic* books does not allow for much variation -- GMs and players are limited to different Power levels and quirks. This article uses the enhancement and limitation system found in pages 102-116 of the *Basic Set* to add variation and customization options.

Many of the modifiers are suitable for changing the energy cost to create enchanted items. All these modifiers should be vetted by the GM as some combinations would not make sense either game mechanically or thematically.

Enhancements

Enhancements (pages 102-109 of the *Basic Set*) may be used to expand or improve the capabilities of an item for an increase in the energy cost. Such items would likely be of higher quality than the standard, or custom ordered. No enhancement may be taken that mimics another spell effect or enchantment. A Critical Success during the enchantment process may optionally add an enhancement worth 5% at no extra energy cost. Appropriate enhancements are:

- *Accurate:* +5%/level. [1]
- *Armor Divisor:* +50%, +100%, +150%, or +200%. [1]
- *Cone:* +50% +10%/yard of maximum width. [1][4]
- *Damage Modifiers:* Double Blunt Trauma (+20%), Double Knockback (+20%), Explosion (+50%/level), and Fragmentation (+15%/die) might be suitable. [1][4]
- *Delay:* +0%, +10%, +20%, or +50%. [3]
- *Drifting:* +20%. [3]
- *Guided or Homing:* Variable cost. If it requires a specific sense, the caster must naturally possess that sense or enchant the necessary sensory spell into the device. [1]
- *Increased Range:* +5%/level or +10%/level. [1]
- *Link:* +10% or +20%. Linked attack spells should be modified to have identical ranged attack stats.
- *Low or No Signature:* +10% or +20%. For non-attack spells these give penalties to magic analysis spells such as Identify Spell and Analyze Magic.
- *Overhead:* +30%. The attack either arcs to arrive on top, or it pops up at the very end. [1]
- *Ranged:* +40%. [3]

- *Underwater:* +20%.

Each enhancement must be learned as an Average Technique of the base spell with a default of -1 per 10% cost, round fractions away from zero. e.g. Damage Modifier (Explosion level 2) is a +100% enhancement -- as a Technique it defaults to the base spell -10; Damage Modifier (Fragmentation level 1) is a +15% enhancement, its separate Technique defaults to the base spell -2. All of these Techniques may be raised until the penalty is bought off.

For the final enchantment roll, add up all Technique differences associated with the desired enhancements and use that as a modifier for the enchantment. e.g. a device will have Explosion level 1 (+50%) and Overhead (+30%), and the enchanter knows the Techniques at base -2 and base -1 respectively, then the enchantment is at a -3 penalty.

Limitations

Limitations (pages 110-116 of the ***Basic Set***) may be applied to enchantments to reduce the energy cost. These must actually be limitations -- enchanted armor with Reduced Range is not really limiting -- as always, GM's call. Appropriate limitations are:

- *Accessibility:* Variable cost.
- *Always On:* Variable cost.
- *Armor Divisor:* -30%, -50%, or -70%. [1]
- *Bombardment:* -5%, -10%, -15%, or -20%. For direct-fire attacks, the effect is that the attack tends to spiral or veer off target. [1]
- *Costs Fatigue:* -5%. This represents an additional FP cost that is unrelated to the energy cost of casting a spell through the item. This is not a magical Fatigue cost and it may not be reduced with the Power enchantment (page 57 of ***Magic***).
- *Costs Hit Points:* -10%. A device fueled by life-force could consume HP instead of or in addition to FP.
- *Damage Limitations:* No Blunt Trauma (-20%), No Knockback (-10%), and No Wounding (-50%). Any of these are suitable for a weakened weapon, but not all of them are applicable to every magical attack item. [1] [4]
- *Dissipation:* -50%. For Area spells or Cone attacks, the spell's effect drops off with distance. [2]
- *Emanation:* -20%. Area spells or effects must always be centered directly on the item.
- *Emergencies Only:* -30%. Full Power in Emergencies Only (-20%) means the user pays the full FP or energy cost, but the effects are halved. [2]
- *Environmental:* Variable cost. Many spells' effects already require some level of this Limitation. To make it more restrictive, use the difference in modifiers' rarities. e.g. Common (-10%) to Rare (-40%) would net a -30% modifier.
- *Inaccurate:* -5%/level.
- *Limited Use:* Variable cost. Enchanted items that already have a "uses per day" as part of the enchantment cost (e.g. a Create Food pot, page 79 of ***Magic***) may not have this limitation intentionally. For any Temporary Enchantment, any level of this is only worth -10%, and it must be at least one fewer than the number of uses the item will possess.
- *Melee Attack:* Variable cost. [1]
- *Maximum Duration:* Variable cost.
- *Minimum Duration:* Variable cost.
- *Nuisance Effect:* Variable cost.

> ## Reverse Engineering Existing Devices
>
> Some enchanted devices already fit into the above scheme. For instance, a Fireball wand costs 800 energy and an Explosive Fireball wand costs 1,200 energy. From the description of Explosive Fireball, we see it is equivalent to a regular Fireball with the modifier Damage Modifier (Explosion level 1) for a +50% energy to create and use (the 2 energy per level of effect is 1 energy times 1.5, rounded up to 2). In cases like this, since the enhanced version fits perfectly into the base version plus modifiers, it should be possible to create an Explosive Fireball wand based on an enhanced version of the regular Fireball spell. This new wand could even have a different level of explosive effect.

- *Preparation Required:* Variable cost. This can represent fiddling with knobs, aligning crystals, mystically "tuning" the device, an activation procedure, or bending it to your will. Weakened Without Preparation is also suitable. [2]
- *Reduced Range:* -5%/level or -10%/level. For non-attack spells, such as Regular spells, multiply the actual distance by the Range Divisor before finding the skill penalty for casting at range.
- *Self-Only:* -25% or -50%. The device can only cast the spell on (or otherwise affect) its own contents. Must be a container of some sort. Use the smaller value (-25%) for items already specified as affecting only the wearer. [5]
- *Specific:* Variable cost.
- *Touch Only:* -40%. The effect occurs directly on the surface of the device and cannot be cast at any range. Not available for items already specified as affecting only the wearer or spells that require a direct touch. [5]
- *Takes Extra Time:* -10%/level.
- *Takes Recharge:* Variable cost.
- *Unreliable:* Variable cost. This is an extra activation roll. Any energy cost must be paid before this activation roll. If the second activation fails, the full energy is lost.
- *Visible:* -10% or -20%.

Any enchanter may choose to use limitations; it takes no special talent or study to make an inferior product.

Explanation of Notes

[1] These enhancements or limitations are only suitable for items that allow an attack spell to be cast, not for enchanted weapons. [2] For these limitations, the GM should be harsh with judging whether a spell can even have a reduced effect; if the effect cannot come in a reduced version, the GM decides whether the outcome is a trivial effect instead (e.g. a weak fizzle of sparks, a warm feeling) or nothing at all. [3] The GM should be especially careful when allowing these, as they have a strong potential for abuse. [4] Because they change the damaging effects of attack spells, these modifiers may be suitable for altering the energy cost to cast a spell in addition to the energy cost to enchant. For fractional energy costs, round up. [5] These limitations are new, but follow from the progression of Reduced Range and Melee Attack.

Example Devices

- An Ice Sphere wand (400 energy to create) enchanted with Damage Modifier (Fragmentation, 1d, +15%), Armor Divisor (0.5, -30%), and Inaccurate -1 (-5%) for a net -20% would cost 320 energy to create. The effect is a brittle icy ball that shatters into sharp fragments on impact. The wand would not be as good in single-combat, but might work well as massed suppressive fire.
- A Season spoon (150 energy to create) with Preparation Required (1 minute, must be dipped into several pots of spice, -20%) and Limited Use (once per day, -40%) gives a net -60%, for a final cost of 60 energy. This Seasoning spoon would be affordable by many more people.
- A Lightning staff (800 energy to create) with Homing (using regular vision, +50%), Reduced Range (1/2D range only, x1/10, -15%) for a net +35% for a final cost of 1080 energy to create. With a successful skill roll, the user would have a bolt that travels at 5 yards per turn for up to 20 turns and strikes with a skill of 13 (base 10 + Acc of 3). With such a low speed, the target might escape by moving faster than the attack.
- The Power enchantment may be given Limited Uses or Preparation Required. If the conditions are not met or the user elects not to use Power with a spell cast through a device, then Power does not modify the casting cost of the spell.

A fleshed-out example:

A Thunderblast staff made by linking together (using Link, +10% for each) the Concussion spell (1000 energy, 1/2D 20, Max 40, Acc 1) having Accurate +1 (+5%), Damage Modifiers (Double Knockback, +20%; No Blunt Trauma, -20%; and No Wounding, -50%) with the Thunderclap spell (300 energy) having Ranged (+40%, gives 1/2D 10, Max

100, Acc 3), Increased Range (1/2D only, ×5, +10%), Inaccurate -1 (-5%), Reduced Range (×½, -10%). So far the device costs 650 + 435 = 1,085 energy. The GM fiddles with the stats and decides that for an extra 115 energy to create there are slight synergistic effects -- the stunning and deafness effects have the same range (10 yards, or 20 yards in an enclosed space) and resistance number (HT -1/level of effect), and the resistance roll is +1 per yard further away. The final combined stats are:

- 1,200 energy and a $400 onyx to create.
- &fract12;D 20, Max 40, Acc 2.
- Energy cost per level of effect is only 1 instead of 2 because the total Damage Modifiers come to -50%. This is fair since the spell does no direct physical damage whatsoever.
- The stunning and deafness effects occur to anyone within 10 yards, or 20 yards in an enclosed space. Resistance rolls for these effects are at +3 beyond 1/2D range.
- Stunned people roll versus the same penalty every turn to recover, at +1 per turn. Protected Hearing grants +5 to HT.
- Deafened people roll versus the same penalty every hour to recover, at +1 per hour. Protected Hearing negates this effect.
- Energy cost to use is 2 points plus 1 per 1d×2 knockback damage and -1 to resist side-effects; the mage may add incremental levels up to Magery-level per second, for up to three seconds. Knockback damage is explosive (see page 414 of the ***Basic Set***).

This Thunderblast staff would have a terrifying effect -- bowling over animals or people and leaving them stunned and deafened, scattering equipment and detritus (see *Incidental Fragmentation* on page 415 of the ***Basic Set***), and might even knock out doors and windows. A wielder with Magery 3 could build the spell for three seconds and launch an attack doing 9d×2 explosive knockback and a HT-9 roll versus stunning and deafness for a cost of 11 points of energy!

Quirks

Quirks acquired during enchantment or in play may be selected from the limitations list or the effect may be the removal of an enhancement. A minor quirk could be a Nuisance Effect, any -5% limitation, or removal of 5% worth of enhancement. A more severe quirk would be worth a -10% limitation or removal of 10%. The addition of new quirks could either add new problems or increase the value of existing problems.

Optional Rule: Appropriate Materials

Enchanting a function into a device that already performs that function reduces the enchantment cost. This optional rule alters the "item" categories for many enchanted devices. The GM should only allow new items that are thematically related. This rule is intended to reduce the cost of common, everyday equipment -- devices that do not need a roll to use; it should never be used to reduce the cost of attack or defense devices, weapons, or resisted spells. If the players devise clever ways to use non-combat devices, that's good roleplaying.

Remember that Appropriate Materials give a discount for a reason. Discounted devices must be limited by their form; objects must be used in the mundane manner and limitations of the object apply to use of the spell.

For example:

- Umbrella (100 energy) cast upon a pendant costs the normal amount, but cast on a long coat gives a -10% reduction in cost, a physical umbrella would give -20%, and a fully waterproof, fur-lined ankle-length oilskin poncho with a hood would give -80% since the device provides nearly the entire benefit of the spell. The downside is that the enchantment is only effective on parts not covered by the material -- a ripped poncho would let rain through the rip.
- A tea kettle or samovar with Boil Water (200 energy) might be worth a -50% reduction for Self-Only; adding in an Accessibility (Only when heated) would be good for an extra -20%. Final cost is 60 energy. The reason to

have such an enchanted tea kettle is mainly convenience -- water is boiled in 10 seconds and produces enough steam to make tea for large groups.

- A microscope with Small Vision (400 energy). Since the spell's item specifies "only affects the wearer", the Self-Only (-50%) and Reduced Range limitations cannot be used. However, the spell only affects objects inside the microscope, so the -25% is allowed. Final cost is 300 energy.
- A cigarette lighter with Ignite Fire (100 energy). Touch Only would give -40% reduction, and appropriate materials (the mundane lighter) would add -20%. Final cost is 40 energy. The lighter would have to be lit since that action is part of the appropriate material, but when additionally casting the spell, the flame is windproof and can produce heat equivalent to burning magnesium.
- A feather duster with Clean (100 energy). Appropriate materials and dusting all surfaces would be good for -30%, Accessibility (only to remove dust) would give another -20%, and Limited Use (2 times/day) for another -30%. Final cost is 20 energy, low enough for Quick & Dirty enchantment. A set of cleaning instruments to polish, dust, scrub, and shine could be had piecemeal and cheaper than buying a single multi-use device.

Introducing Modifiers to an Ongoing Campaign

Bringing enchantment modifiers into a campaign can be as simple as the opening vignette -- the group finds a shop selling magic trinkets at bargain prices only to find that the trinkets are quite limited. Or any of these others:

- A magic weapon far more powerful than the standard versions is acquired, e.g. Armor Divisors or Increased Range. The device could be a family heirloom that someone inherits, a piece found in a ruined castle or ancient dungeon, loot from a defeated foe, or a cutting-edge new McGuffin to be kept from the enemy.
- A scouting force for an invading army has been defeated either by the heroes or defending soldiers. It comes out that all the invaders had magical gear: Umbrella cloaks, Create Water flasks, Ignite Fire wands, Preserve Food sacks, and so on. Regular enchantments of these types for this many would be very expensive but it seems nearly all of the invaders possess them. How can anyone afford so many? Once the secret -- Quick & Dirty casting of limited enchantments -- is discovered, the defending realm will try to supply their own soldiers with cheap magic goods. The ensuing arms race keeps enchanters too busy to deal with adventurers.

How to Build a Pantheon

A More Creative Approach to Religion in Fantasy Roleplaying Games

by Chris Drysdale

"Having just one religion is a failure of the imagination."
--P. Dunn

Although the approach to religion in many fantasy roleplaying games works for most dungeon crawls, it can lead to an oversimplification of the priestly classes, and often turns them from priests in their own right into a secondary type of magic-user. In order to rescue clerics from this fate, their relationships with religion can be explored and expanded. Those players looking for more out of these characters can roleplay a deeper and personal relationship between the PC and the deity or deities. For the populace of the created world, the gods are not myths, but facts. Keeping this in mind will help flesh out the character, and in the long run, the world in which he or she lives. For GMs interested in creating more complex cosmologies, mythologies, and pantheons, the process below provides a few ideas to help with development.

To begin creating more realistic religions in campaigns, the GM can inject a greater level of complexity into the pantheons. Traditionally in fantasy roleplaying games, pantheons are mechanistic in their approach. Deities have sharply defined spheres of influence which are usually based on modern Western ideas of what "goes together." This, when combined with a plot-driven need to create simple conflicts, can be useful for roleplaying games, especially short campaigns, single session "storm the wizard tower" games, or games that have very little to do with religion. On the down side, priests and clerics become simply another kind of mage, one with a specific dogma that is often negotiated outside the game or ignored in part or entirely. Priests are in contact with their deity or deities; they are given the ability to alter the world through clerical magic. It is "unrealistic" (as much as the word can be applied to fantasy roleplaying games) that they could ignore the strictures of their faith without consequences. Clerical spells are not inherent abilities; each and every one is a gift from the deity in question. To the character, clerical spells are not "spells." Each is a mystery of faith and an expression of the will and power of a deity within the world.

Actual pantheons and their associated mythologies are filled with complex patterns. There are no simple arrangements of powers associated with deities; these naturally evolved systems are idiosyncratic. No longer do we see a god of light associated only with fluffy bunnies and happy thoughts, or the overwhelming of darkness. Apollo of the Greek pantheon was associated with the sun, and with poetry, but also with plague. Athena was a goddess of wisdom, war, and weaving, and the city of Athens. The heroes and deities that we see are much more like people than they are like forces of nature or archetypes. The gods, at least as much as other characters in the game-world, are complex and dynamic. As such, not all aspects of their "personalities" hold together in neat categories. What follows are some ideas that will help a GM create pantheons that will mirror some of the richness of naturally evolved religious systems, as well as some ideas for players to capitalize on this for the development of their characters.

Discover a Model

The first step is to find a group of people to use as a model for your fictional pantheon. A family you know well and their friends would work, as would a group of friends or co-workers from your past. (It is strongly recommend against using any members of the gaming group as a model. Since you will be striving to mythologize, stereotype, and caricature these models in the process of creating the new pantheon, it is best to use people that will not be recognized to avoid cases of mistaken identity and hurt feelings.) Mirror the relationships among the people you have selected to create a rich web of relationships for both the deities and their priesthoods. Rather than the simple deities which almost seem to take their places on a neatly organized chess-board, create a series of complex and changing relationships that mirror those we have as people. Family, friendship, loyalty, love, betrayal, indifference, and more can all be used as fuel for the myths, relationships, and struggles of the deities and their followers. As far as spheres of influence go, try

to associate each of the people in your model as closely as possible with the areas in which they have an interest. Thus, you might model a goddess of law, motherhood, and inspiration after a friend who is a lawyer, a mother, and a visual artist. You might end up with overlap as well, with several gods and goddesses associated with hunting, for instance.

It is not necessary to define smaller areas of influence for each (such as hunting for sustenance, or maintaining ecological balance) because the reasons each character might pray to one deity or another will vary in more ways than just the type of spell. As an example, if the character is hunting someone to bring them to justice, the goddess of law may well grant a spell to help find them, even though at first blush it will not seem like a spell that would come from a goddess of law. For color, and to add a bit of mystery to the world, each deity might change how the spell appears. If a spell were used to track a murderous villain through a forest, then a wilderness deity might simply make the tracks appear more obvious to the priest, while a law-deity might make the footprints glow with a ghostly, bloody light for all to see. Nor does the spell have to look the same every time. As the GM, just think how the person from the model might think to do it. Is he a hard-nosed rationalist? Then perhaps the event will look like a coincidence. Is he more spiritual? Then perhaps it will look more like a miracle. The priest, however, will know the nature of the event.

You might also consider using characters from a piece of fiction you have read or watched, but isn't as advisable. The main advantage of this method for creating a pantheon is that it reflects natural patterns of interaction rather than fictional conventions. "Truth is stranger than fiction," and taking advantage of this will make the pantheons, and the worlds they have spawned or are lords over, richer and more entertaining.

Translate the Model

Take advantage of stories you have heard to create mythologies that have the depth of experience of real life. Stories of trips that the "model" people took, or experiences they had, can become legends with just a little bit of exaggeration and a change of setting. Keep the elements of the story the same, flatten out the side-characters, cut or change the anachronisms, and try to adhere to a story-arc that will entertain the audience. A demanding professor might become a frightening giant, and an employer might become a king who assigns near-impossible tasks to a hero. A suitor for the same girlfriend might be interpreted as an evil prince, a famous pirate, or even dragon! In this way, a mythology can be built up around any deity quickly and easily. This method can also be used to create new myths on the spur of the moment. Not all of these myths need to hold together, nor do the myths have to be unique to each deity. Myth-borrowing within and between pantheons happened even with historical cultures. Certainly a GM should feel free to do so in his own campaign!

While myths are often told and interpreted in very literal ways, this is a modern understanding of how myths were understood. For those people who related and retold them, multiple levels of interpretation would go on simultaneously. As an example, let's look at a myth about a deity named Gerril, a hero in a created pantheon. We might tell a story about how he traveled across the seas to bring back a branch of a tree to help with the beginning of farming (or fire, or what-have-you). This motif of branches as symbols of creation might be carried on in other myths heard from different sources. Alina, Goddess of the Golden City, might have a similar myth in which she goes to find a branch which becomes the foundation of the city. Now, did the deities actually go on such a journey? Or did they, as deities, do something so far beyond the scope of human understanding that the only way to talk about it is describe a hero going on a quest and returning with a branch? The first interpretation takes all the mystery from the myth, and the player characters will eventually end up on a quest to gather all of these branches. The second interpretation allows for a certain amount of metaphor. The branches may be symbolic of the deities' creative abilities, or perhaps certain families important in the discovering of knowledge or the founding of the cities. The quest upon which the players embark may be to find out the nature of the "branch," eventually involving them in an attempt to restore the throne for the bloodline in question. Rather than simply encountering rational (or random) monsters thrown in the way, blocks to the quest may be part of an overall scheme by the deities in question, with some hindering and some helping. This will color both the nature of these encounters and the players' reactions to them, turning a chance encounter into one fraught with meaning. This is especially important if the players can never be quite sure if their interpretations are correct, with hints and disinformation mixed together, both also influenced by the nature of the priesthoods and deities in question.

Once you have a basic mythology, or at least a few myths (a creation myth is usually pretty important and a good place to start) and an understanding of the world they portray, it is time to go on to the next phase. Take the characters out of the myths and begin to turn them into the "deities" that we usually see in games. Keep the associations from the new myths, however. For example, you might have Gerril: god of fire, farming, travel, and the magic of creation. Or Alina: goddess of anything that happens in the Golden City (who might also be invoked outside of the city by citizens). Note that those spheres overlap. That does not mean they have to conflict. A citizen of the Golden City might call upon both Gerril and Alina to protect crops to feed the city.

Integrate the Pantheon into the World

Rather than deciding on themes from the start, see what themes can be pulled from the mythology you have created. If the mythology centers on the triumph of the underdog, this theme can be interlaced into the entire campaign. If it centers on the forces of love and loyalty to overcome evil, then this might be used as well. If it centers on the decay and dissolution of the human spirit and the fragmentation of relationships, then these relationships should be reflected in the religion and politics of the world. In a fantasy campaign, it is usual that either the deities are reflections of the world, or the creators of it. Either way, the same themes that run through the mythology should also run through the world in which it exists. The overall structure of the world need not be changed, but the themes that are part of the created mythology should be given special emphasis in the campaign. Conflicts in the world that match the conflicts of the gods will attract their attention. The gods, and their priesthoods, will become involved. If a prince decides to depose his father and take the throne, a god who did the same might offer help in some way, because to the god this is a reflection and justification of the world.

Some cultures contain mythologies with two pantheons layered one atop another. What happens when people with one religion invade or migrate to a land where there is already a different religion? One, or the other, might become dominant, but more commonly the two are melded, stories are swapped, and the overall number of gods increases. In addition, religions often reflect the cultures in which they exist, and a world in which the pantheons are limited by geography, by language, or by culture will certainly be more complex and interesting than one in which only one set of gods is "true."

What do these changes mean for priests? Rather than "spells" for the priests, the gifts should be a response to the prayers of the character. Some GMs might be interested in having the player actually give the prayer, or at least part of it. This requires more effort, but if the GM gives bonuses to the effects, it is amazing how creative the players will become. One advantage of this process is that it forces the players to examine the motivations of their characters. Priests are not just members of the party, but representatives of their religions as well:

Stepping away from his friend on the bloodied bed, the gold-and-white robed man moved to the candle-lit shrine in the corner of the room. Raising his open hands over his head as a faraway look came into his eyes, Priest-Guardsman Masak intoned, "Alina, Patron Goddess of the Golden City, I pray to you in this time of need. My companion, Vernolph, is a citizen of yours. He has fallen at the hands of the bandits who have plagued your lands. I, your servant and Watcher of the Gate of Norr, ask for your blessing that he may rise again to defend your city. By the Sword and the Key, I ask this gift!"

Compare this to "I cast Restore Life on Frank's character." No, it's not great literature, but it adds more color to the campaign, some depth to the character, and makes it very difficult for a priest to abuse his powers for his own gain. With some improvisational skills and a deep understanding of the character, a player might find himself collaborating with the GM to create further myths, simply spinning tales on the spot.

Just as much as books, movies, and other media, roleplaying is myth-making. The stories that we tell have relevance and meaning. The myth-within-a-myth that is religion is important for evoking a deeper experience of the game-world. When priests take the reins of their own destinies, working to best serve their deities, they take their places as both servants and leaders. When gods are no longer simply archetypes, but complex "characters" with histories, motivations, and ambiguities of their own, the priests and worshippers who follow them will no longer be straight-jacketed into flat-feeling religions that are no more than a set of rules. There will always be worshippers who insist on

literal meanings for their myths, but there is no reason the gods must be trapped in the same interpretation. Finding a model for a pantheon that assists in developing complexity, and working with its myths on both literal and symbolic levels, will free the gods and their followers to be full individuals in their own right.

Silisia

for *GURPS* and *d20 System*

by Wayne Ligon

Silisia is a petite young woman, about 20 years old. She's pretty, but could never be called beautiful. She has short black hair, warm dark brown eyes, and a dusky-olive skin tone. She carries herself well, and has kept herself in reasonably fit condition. Silisia is, however, a master of disguise and deception. She can appear slightly shorter or taller, a little older or younger; change her hair color and style, and use any of a hundred small stage tricks meant to distract the eye. She is as much actor as make-up artist; she knows that the proper inflection in her voice, the way she carries herself, her attitude and demeanor are as effective in concealing her features and intentions as any pot of greasepaint.

Silisia is a con artist of a particularly low and despicable breed. She delights in causing trouble for trouble's sake and has no conscience at all. She will practice her art on the elderly, upon young children, upon anyone she thinks can feel pain. The pain of others is a sweet balm to her, and she takes great pride in the string of ruined lives and broken homes she's left in her wake. Silisia has several con games she plays but, like all artists, she has her favorites.

Silisia's preferred con is to pretend to be a priestess of the agricultural goddess, who are known and trusted throughout the land for their good works and wise advice. (Substitute an appropriate deity for the campaign. Her favorite disguise involves any priesthood that is especially trusted and beyond reproach.) She's made a study of them, and can fool most of the laity and low-ranking members of the actual priesthood. She will arrive as a simple traveling player and sit in a tavern, gather the gossip, and form character sketches of the locals. She'll buy drinks and assimilate for a few days, using her skills to gather and confirm any useful information.

After she has learned several dark or embarrassing secrets, then it's time for the "priestess" to make an appearance. Her garb and goods are simple; she's portraying a simple wandering healer, after all. Her healing magic makes the disguise extremely plausible and she will make it a point to heal someone in public view as soon as possible, accepting no fee for her services. From that point on, she will talk to and advice the people as if she was a trusted priestess, but soon she begins to manipulate those who come to her for help. She weaves truth and lies to best effect, and seldom needs what magic she's learned. Using the information she gained before, she will then sow chaos and mistrust through the small town. She will fake curing diseases, "drive out evil spirits," perform marriages, provide witness, or serve as an impartial judge, all for a fee. She will take no reward for herself, of course, but is glad to take any coin offered "for the grand temple in the big city" or "the poor."

She'll leave after she has turned friend against friend, ruined true love, destroyed marriages that have lasted for decades, and caused at least a couple of deaths. So many people in these outlying settlements have nothing but the love of the gods and she uses that belief to her own ends. She will subtly blackmail people who have especially interesting secrets: "Brother Theodore, I would have you know that the Goddess does not look favorably upon those who feel the way you feel about your nephew. Such a handsome lad, is he not? If I had the silver, though, I could make certain that the High Priest in the city includes you in his prayers for salvation and that no undue investigation is needed here."

Silisia in the Campaign

Silisia is a sadistic rogue who can be encountered any place but most often in small outlying villages where news cannot spread very fast. She can be a chance encounter on the road, or be met in one of her major guises in a tavern or market. She will try to extract any interesting information out of anyone she spends time with and use it to her own best advantage later. She won't have any dealings with the authorities if she can help it, and she will avoid contact with anyone who looks like they might be "the law," or a real priest of whatever religion she's pretending to be.

The *effects* of Silisia's passage can also be encountered. A town that has recently hosted her will be full of shouting matches, crying, glares, embarrassed looks, and perhaps a suicide or two. Many people will be on edge, and tempers can easily run hotter than normal. If the townspeople have reason to believe they've been swindled or manipulated, newcomers will find it very hard to talk to anyone. Priests will be especially distrusted.

Silisia in *GURPS*

Silisia   *152 points*

Age 20; Human; nondescript appearance, black hair, brown eyes (Hair may be dyed, or a wig used)

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 14 [10]; Per 12 [0]; FP 13 [6].
Basic Speed 5.5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 8 (Rapier).

Social Background

TL: 3 [0].
CF: Same as the campaign setting.
Languages: The campaign's common language (Native) [0]

Advantages

Charisma 3 [15]; Magery 1 (Song) [6]; Magery 0 [5]; Musical Ability 1 [5]; Voice [10].

Perks

Honest Face [1].

Disadvantages

Sadism (12 or less) [-15]; Secret Identity (Possible Death) [-30]; Selfish (12 or less) [-5].

Skills

Acting-15 (IQ+3) [12]; Carousing-11 (HT+0) [1]; Detect Lies-12 (Per+0) [4]; Diplomacy-13 (IQ+1) [2]; Disguise/TL3 (Human)-13 (IQ+1) [6]; Enthrallment (Persuade)-15 (Will+1) [8]; Enthrallment (Sway Emotions)-13 (Will-1) [2]; Escape-10 (DX-1) [2]; Fast-Talk-14 (IQ+2) [2]; Fortune-Telling (Augury)-12 (IQ+0) [0]; Fortune-Telling (Dream Interpretation)-12 (IQ+0) [0]; Intimidation-13 (Will-1) [1]; Lockpicking/TL3-11 (IQ-1) [1]; Makeup/TL3-14 (IQ+2) [4]; Musical Instrument (Mandolin)-13 (IQ+1) [4]; Public Speaking-16 (IQ+4) [1]; Rapier-10 (DX-1) [1]; Savoir-Faire (Religion)-12 (IQ+0) [1]; Sex Appeal-12 (HT+1) [1].

Spells

Blur-11 [1]; Continual Light-11 [1]; Darkness-11 [1]; Detect Magic-11 [1]; Lend Energy-11 [1]; Lend Vitality-11 [1]; Light-11 [1]; Mind-Reading-13 [4]; Minor Healing-13 [4]; Sense Emotion-11 [1]; Sense Foes-11 [1]; Truthsayer-13 [4].

Silisia in the *d20 System*

Silisia: Female Human Brd5; Medium Humanoid ; HD 5d6+5 (Bard); hp 23; Init +2; Spd 30; AC 14; Atk +3 base melee, +5 base ranged; +3 (1d6, Sword, short); +3 (1d4, Dagger); AL CE; SV Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +7; STR 10, DEX 14, CON 12, INT 13, WIS 16, CHA 17.

Possessions: Dagger; Short sword; Leather armor

Skills: Alchemy +3, Bluff +13, Concentration +4, Diplomacy +6, Disguise +9, Escape Artist +4, Gather Information +7, Intimidate +4, Knowledge (religion) +6, Perform (Stringed Instrument) +11, Sense Motive +7, Spellcraft +2.

Feats: Brew Potion, Quick Draw, Skill Focus: Bluff.

Spells Known (Brd 3/4/2): 0 -- Daze, Detect Magic, Mage Hand, Prestidigitation, Read Magic, Resistance; 1st -- Alarm, Charm Person, Cure Light Wounds, Sleep; 2nd -- Detect Thoughts, Invisibility, Suggestion.

Spice Up Your Setting

by Sean Miner

Fred: Ragnor's gonna show these foreigners how a northern barbarian can eat. What's on the menu?
GM: Rabbit stew, roast venison, wildflower salad for the elves. To drink there's house wine, fine wine and elven wine.
Fred: What, again? That's like all he ever eats! We came hundreds of miles through the Desert of Turmoil for this?
GM: Oh, wait, I was, um, looking at the wrong thing, No, they have . . . curried lamb with couscous, chicken in curry sauce and, um, mint tea.
Fred: Wait. Isn't that what we ordered at that Moroccan place with your brother last week?
GM: Um. So? It's like Morocco. It's got sand and stuff.
Fred: That's it. I bust out the ring of teleportation and go to Khazad-Durk for dwarven food.
*GM: What, for **lunch?** Dude, that's like 5,000 miles away!*
*Fred: Yeah, so it should be around noon there; I'm getting the lunch special! **GM:** (Irritably) Yeah, yeah . . . okay, they've got . . . (inventing madly) . . . goat stew, roast pork and fresh-baked brickbread. And to drink there's dwarven spirits . . . fine dwarven spirits . . . and, uh . . . house . . . dwarven . . . spirits.*
Fred: I start to rage.

Historically, one of the defining characteristics of voyages to exotic lands was the discovery of strange new foods. Often, however, different lands in fantasy worlds tend to have more or less the same cuisine, sometimes distinguished by varieties of wine and cheese. People everywhere seem to raise the same apples, potatoes, beef, mutton and chicken, even when the natural flora and fauna include such curiosities six-legged, fire-breathing lizards and sentient, man-eating plants.

Even when such cuisines are distinct, they tend to mirror those of existing cultures. Thus, ninja and samurai characters eat rice, bean curd and raw fish, while desert chieftains eat couscous and lamb kebobs. Making the problem worse, most players -- living in a world of ethnic restaurants on every corner -- are familiar with these. It can be difficult for a player to get excited at his explorer character's discovery of the noodle when he has a pantry full of pasta. Indeed, each year seems to be a competition among culinary magazines and gourmet restaurants to discover the newest ingredients, which quickly become standard grocery store items.

Here, therefore, are several foods guaranteed to be unfamiliar to the average player. None requires magic or any advanced scientific process, so they are suitable for most campaigns, whether found in a fantasy realm or on an alien planet.

Butterpats

You see someone eating a round, greenish-yellow fruit with evident enthusiasm. He has peeled back the thick, citrus-like rind and occasionally bites the fruit, occasionally picks out a section of the yellow pulp with his fingers and pop it into his mouth. Your curiosity is piqued until one of the yellow sections falls on the floor without his notice . . . and begins to slowly crawl way.

Butterpats are usually sold by the fruit -- but they are not fruit themselves. They are, in fact, the larvae of a wasplike insect. They are injected beneath the rind of immature *pouspous* fruits as eggs and grow to maturity eating away at the pulp -- which is bitter and unpalatable to humans. The butterpats transform the pulp, including the bitter tannins, into fats and proteins which they store up for their metamorphosis into adults. If allowed to remain until the fruit would be ripe, 15-25 larvae (depending on the size of the fruit) generally will have displaced all pulp; this is the peak of their flavor, just before they pupate. Once they have pupated, they become crunchy and take on a less pleasant flavor, though they are still edible. Two weeks later, they hatch as adults and fly away. Adults are not toxic, but are not particuarly palatable, losing the last of their pleasant flavor and consisting largely of inedible legs and wings.

Butterpats can look intimidating and even repulsive to the first-time eater. They are flattened, ¾" to 1" long and

slightly less wide, matte yellow, and are soft-bodied. They are dry to the touch, unless found in rotting fruit (in which case they are usually not eaten) and their skin has a texture like that of a newborn, hairless mouse.

Butterpats are typically eaten live, from the rind, though they are sometimes fried. They are named for their rich, sweetish oily taste as well as their yellow color. They sometimes have a nutty flavor, but this depends more on the fruit on which they fed than on any strain of butterpat. Several strains of pouspous fruit have been bred, and all are cultivated solely for butterpat propagation.

Klaash

Your host sets a generous table. You covertly check to see that nothing is moving, then smile at your hosts. The food bears little resemblance to what you expected. Not that this is bad . . . just very, very different. A small glass of spirits is set before you; exactly what you need to settle your nerves. Following your host's example, you knock it back at once. Then the world turns into fire. Behind the red veil of your vision, you think you may be screaming.

An everyday aperitif in its land, klaash has given the region a greater reputation for spicy foods than it deserves. In fact, much of the cuisine is rather bland . . . until a draught of klaash remedies this.

To prepare klaash, select varieties of very hot peppers are ground into paste, and partly dried so the paste thickens. Sometimes hot seeds and other, more mundane spices are added at this point. This mixture is then buried and allowed to ferment for a few weeks.

The resulting fermented paste is mixed in small amount with fruit juice, broth, water or wine, depending on the meal and local tastes. After settling for a few hours, the clear liquid at the top is poured off and served in very small cups or glasses. It is served immediately before a meal and quaffed in one pull.

Foreigners are apt to find this overwhelming, sometimes suffering shivers and excessive sweating for hours afterward. Even those accustomed to it feel significant effects -- traditionally, it should bring a single tear to the eye. While outsiders have reported an inability to properly taste anything for days, native drinkers insist klaash has a flavor-enhancing effect on the meal. To those used to it, "cool" flavors, such as mints, are enhanced, and otherwise hot flavors are tamed so that their subtler flavors can be tasted more clearly. Some other nuances, however, are lost completely.

Klaash is also reputed to be a digestive aid, and larger doses are of medical use in stimulating perspiration. For those who wish to use it as such, klaash is indeed a severe eye irritant, about on par with any other hot sauce. (This is true regardless of one's experience drinking it.)

Harvalya

*You are running late for your meeting with the merchant who you've sailed so many weeks to see. You're still bleary-eyed from last night's **klaash** and you don't know the language as well as you thought. You decide to grab something that looks safe, and see something like a greenish potato. Tossing some coins to the vendor, you run off, eating as you go. The world blurs behind your tears as your first bite fills your mouth with stewed, spiced peppers.*

The *harvalya* is considered a humble enough food, but is very popular. It is an ovoid tuber resembling a potato; depending on the variety, there range from two inches to nearly a foot in length and are reddish-brown to greenish-brown in color.

Unlike the potato, the harvalya is hollow beneath its skin and a thin, starchy layer. This hollow was used to store water in the dry lands of its wild ancestor, but in the more humid lands where it is now grown, the flooding rains never come, so it remains empty. Now the hollow is almost universally used for stuffing; baked or steamed, the harvalya makes a convenient casing for almost any food, being the sandwich bun equivalent of its land. Such *harvu* are very common street foods, easy to eat on the run and less attractive to insects than the fillings alone.

The sweeter varieties (particularly the tiny purple-black harvalya of the highlands) are excellent filled with fresh or stewed fruits and glazed for desserts, while a larger green-brown variety has a chestnut flavor that goes well with meats.

Honeypods

On your last day before returning home, you find yourself wondering why you came. After the debacle of your meeting, your pride hurts almost as badly as the throbbing behind your eyes. It's been two days since you last dared try the local foods, and you are hungrier than someone of your station should ever be. Your stomach growls as you see a small child happily popping small, rounded pods into his mouth, and you look away, embarrassed, as you catch his eye. A moment later, you feel a tug on your clothing, and look down to find the smiling child offering you the bowl of green pods. Cautiously, you pick up one of the sticky balls and place it between your teeth. You bite down gingerly and cool sweetness fills your mouth. You find that you are weeping tears of joy.

Honeypods are the syrupy seedpods found on a certain climbing plant. In the wild, the pods contain many hard seeds, which make them less useful, as they must be mashed and strained, and much of the weight is waste. Cultivation, however, includes burning or snipping the young flowers, so the pods remain sterile and never develop seeds. Other than being sweet, they taste nothing like honey, being slightly lemony.

Honeypods have different uses in different stages of development. The immature pods, about 1" round, are sweet but still solid vegetable matter, similar to sweet cucumber or apple flesh. These can be eaten raw or candied. Mature pods are three to five inches long, and sticky with exuded syrup unless washed (this is usually done lest they attract insects), and are filled with sugary syrup. At this stage, children enjoy sucking the syrup out, but the pods are more often pressed for their syrup, or mashed and mixed into recipes. If not used fresh, the pods crystallize and dehydrate, becoming much lighter and more stable, and it is in this form that they are usually shipped. The dried husks become papery but tough enough to endure handling, and keep out insects. They can keep indefinitely in this form if they stay dry, but may grow moldy in humid environments.

In some dishes, pods are steeped in wine or spirits to somewhat reconstitute them. More often, aged pods are pounded into a granular sugar, either to sweeten dishes or to be fermented. The pods do not ferment well on their own, but make an excellent addition to grain-based fermentation, having natural acids that aid the aging process.

Wr0ng Numb3rs

Anecdote the First: In one episode of the classic 1966 *Batman* television show, Batman attempts to coax out some criminal goons from a van by activating the Ultrasonic Batray, which emits a loud sound designed to stun and immobilize. Oh, and -- according to the Batman -- this device operates at 12,000 decibels. Now, in watching the episode, this number immediately trigger my "What the heck?!" instinct.

So I did some research. According to Wikipedia, a rocket engine at 30 meters is 150 decibels, and the theoretical decibel limit of a sound at one atmosphere environmental pressure is 194. Meanwhile, on the Decibel Level Chart (at the appropriately named makeitlouder.com), the highest entry on their chart is 320, which would be the equivilant of a 14-gigaton bomb which, if nuclear, would create a crater 12.4 miles wide and 1.33 miles deep.

Oh, and remember that decibels are logarithmic, so that 12,000-decibel figure represents a **_REALLY_** flippin' huge number. I suspect his willingness to even consider using the Ultrasonic Batray in the first place is further evidence of the Batman's ruthless vigilance against the forces of crime: "Cover your ears, Robin; I'm going to flush out the criminals by *destroying the universe!*"

Anecdote the Second: In a nonfiction book I read recently, I encountered the following sentence: "As a guy in his fifties, I've eaten well over 75,000 lunches in my lifetime." (He uses the word "lunches" again and again, and it's clear he's not talking about mere meals.) Again, doing some back-of-the-envelope calculations, and going with the most generous assumptions (eating lunches from out of the womb, being 59.99 years old, calculating a year with 365.25 days), the writer still eats about 3.5 lunches a day . . . a rate that makes hobbits look like supermodels and which has only been matched by Orson Welles' dietary regimen when he was bulking up for his role as the planet-sized Transformer Unicron.

Anecdote the Third: The *Star Wars* movies. I frequently impress my peers by my ability to make grocery runs in less than 12 parsecs yet find myself awakening in sheets soaked with sweat at the thought of picking off womp rats that aren't "much bigger than two meters." Hint to all parents: Once your children learn to drive, teach them *not* to take pot-shots at creatures that are larger than a bull elk from the moving vehicle.

In RPGs, it's easy to "wing it" with many different disciplines; a player can say things like, "Look, I'm a skilled doctor and I say that this man is suffering from internal hemorrhaging; if we don't treat him now, he's dead!" and have a reasonably certain chance that it could be true. Likewise a GM might say, "Okay; this building is on fire and it will burn down in less than an hour unless you're able to stop it" and have a reasonable chance of it being right.

But there's one area where all the helpings of GM fiat or emphatic player acting won't help one lick, and that's where you use hard numbers . . . and those numbers are wrong. If you use units without knowing what they mean, or make up numbers, it's entirely possible for them to be wrong. And it only takes one player at a table to know that a number or unit is wrong for the game world to shudder; if you get enough of them, the suspension of disbelief might snap entirely.

So, in an effort to avoid the dread fate of any campaign degenerating to *Batman* levels of wrongness (at least, those that don't want to start out there in the first place), here are some tips I have for dealing with units.

If at all possible, avoid specifics by using comparisons. For example, if Han Solo had said, "Of course my ship's fast. It holds the current record speed on the Kesel run," no one would have batted an eye. Likewise if Batman has referred to his device as "the loudest device known to humanity that doesn't cause permanent hearing loss," then that would have been fine. If you don't know the units, it's perfectly acceptable to describe the effects in terms that people *do* know, and this most often involves the use of comparisons.

Likewise, if a rocket is able to make the trip from Utah to Antarctica in 25 minutes, you can just say that rather than making up some "million miles a minute" number that will almost certainly be incorrect. Remember that in gaming, much like the real world, knowing exact units is nowhere as important as knowing the effects of the item being

measured.

Do research. For adventures that will be plotted and paced out ahead of time, there's no reason for the GM not to look up and scientific terms he's not familiar with, and do research as necessary. This will enable you to both make sure your numbers are right and give you the opportunity to put the numbers in terms the players will understand, since there's a good chance they won't have researched that info as recently as you. (In addition to my own unending supply of brainy science-minded pals, the folks over on various *Pyramid* message boards have been instrumental in helping me with fiddly science bits that I may not have known before.)

As a player, it's a bit more difficult, but it should be possible to make up a "cheat sheet" of information your character is likely to know. For example, the player of an astronomer might make a cheat sheet of parsecs, light years (which is a measure of distance, not time), degrees kelvin, and the like, while a chemist might jot down what a mole is.

Make up units. Whether fantasy or science fiction, it's entirely possible for no real-world units to be involved at all, and all named units to be referenced only by broad names that give a sense of the overall information without being anything that can be reverse-engineered easily. From "warp factors" and "stardates" to "clicks" and "horse-leagues," these units have a long history with many different fictional universes. In fact, the inexactness of these units fits in with many genres; it can be incongrous for a fantasy elf to talk about centimeters, but it might be very appropriate for him to mention that something is "three fingers." It can even be applicable to more modern settings, such as the time noted American imagineer Jimmy Carter pulled his famous hoax of inventing the "metric system," then managed to convince the rest of the world that the United States would be using this whimsical measurement system.

In the real world -- jobs, school, and the like -- we're rewarded with being able to pinpoint exact numbers. However, in fiction and gaming, numbers are often a lot more difficult to come by, and attempts at fabrication may well cause cracks in the game. With a few simple steps, it should be possible to sidestep this thorny problem without creating a lot of additional work. The alternative will encourage Batman to pull out some device and inflict it on evil . . . and the universe might not survive if that happens.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

GURPS for Dummies

Written by Adam Griffith, Bjoern-Erik Hartsfvang, & Stuart J. Stuple

Edited by Christopher Morris, Andy Hollandbeck, Sean Punch, Jessica Kramer, & TECHBOOKS Production Services

Layout & graphics by Carl Byers, Andrea Dahl, Lauren Goddard, Denny Hager, Joyce Haughey, & Heather Ryan

Cartoons by Rich Tennant

432 pages & miniature reference "screen"; $21.00

Perhaps it's the status symbol for the new millennium: you know you've really arrived when someone writes a *. . . for Dummies* book about your corner of the world. *Dungeons & Dragons* has its book (two of them, actually), and now there's *GURPS for Dummies*. The series has allowed increasingly nebulous definitions of its products. This one says its purpose is not to explain *GURPS* but to give you a better handle on playing it. If you find the core *GURPS Basic Set* baffling, this won't clear anything up. More accurately, the same material presented in a different way may help but it would be accidental.

The authors claim it's useful for both new and experienced players, and this seems to be true to a point. The building blocks for a character, the development of the campaign, the world-building, assigning character points, even the use of technology . . . if it's in the game book it has a mirror image here. The effect is scattershot, though. In one part, you'll get good insight into why Enemy is an awful disadvantage for your player, but elsewhere you get a laundry list of advantages about accessing the "other world." Having them all in one place is a convenience, true, but does it make *GURPS* more accessible in a substantial way? Skills and disadvantages fall into a similar pattern, and choosing what kind of character to play isn't breaking new ground.

They mention ways to spend points with greater thrift (such as buying up the attribute instead of all the little skills based on it), but the "more bang for your buck" thing has been done before and done better in other *GURPS* books (notably *[Who's Who 2](#)* and *[Wizards](#)*). This is another case of convenience with questionable lasting value. Making a survivable character and how to approach various combat scenarios is really the only thing this section does well, so as long as fighting's your thing . . .

Like a game screen, the book splits evenly between the players and the GM, and the referee's is easily the worthier half. Anyone's game manual will envy some of their organic game-construction tips. Where the front of the book breezes past advantages and disadvantages, this part shows exactly how to grab (or force) players' attention where you want it using those same character stats. (And note, it's all kosher -- they suggest nothing that creates an adversarial system between GM and party.)

The last part does have its troubles. Not all the gamemaster nods are *GURPS*-specific (do you want another "how to GM" book or did you come for the *GURPS?*). The authors' own campaign provides several good examples, but oddly confusing bits arise as well. Sure, Excel is handy, but there's a whole other *. . . for Dummies* book about it for a reason; if you lack familiarity, making a combat grid with it is of limited utility. Too short to really educate you and too long to ignore as a simple sidebar, Excel ideas pop up elsewhere. Making maps with it is a nifty idea, and those

tips should be within most folks' grasp. Still other thoughts are truly incongruous: You can milk atmosphere from descriptions of clothes and interior design, but that section isn't part of the culture section from 60 pages ago, it's in with campaign flavor. Too many tangents stand out as little islands drifting apart from the whole, whether from organizational choices or just a lack of any decent place to put them.

The editing, sad to say, is also badly off (and this isn't small-press publishing). Putting aside grammar and typos, the authors fall back on reusing the same words and phrases. "Unarmed Combat Skills" mentions those proficiencies *and* non-combat skills that help (like throwing and acrobatics). Not only does pairing these under one title do the second category a disservice; *not only* is the latter set not produced for another 10+ pages; the two are separated by damage, defense, maneuvers, and techniques. Worst of all, the text mentions two chapters in the famous "part of tens" that don't exist (at least the table of contents omits them). The website doesn't help here.

. . . for Dummies puts a lot of little yellow reference screens and sheets into their books, so it's disappointing this one doesn't feel up to snuff. It's a bit on the papery side. It's almost entirely given over to combat, including critical hit and miss tables; attack and defense modifiers for ranged and melee combat; hit locations; and maneuvers ("Reactions" is the odd man out). It's odd since combat doesn't get any more play in the book than other subjects (and therefore it's not much use as a reference), but it may have made the most sense since it's the central process in any RPG. The artwork is mostly combed from **GURPS Basic Set,** save Rich Tennant's *Fifth Wave* comics. While they seem strained, they're still quite funny, and his style continues to please.

It's hard to imagine any one demographic for which **GURPS for Dummies** would be a perfect fit. It's not a bad book -- it has good ideas peppered throughout -- but it may be more like a GM's reference guide than a player's in that a gaming group could buy a single copy and it would cure all manner of ills one participant at a time. Hardly all things to all players, this hit-or-miss volume fails to make a lasting impression, but is worth browsing to find the gems you need.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Tsuro: The Game of the Path

Published by WizKids, Inc.

Designed by Tom McMurchie

Illustrated by Shane Small

9-inch Square Full Color Fold Out Board, 35 2½-inch squares Tiles, One 2½-inch square Dragon Tile, Eight Colored Markers, 9-by-18-inch Full color card Rules Sheet, & One 5-by-7-inch 16-Page B&W Foreign Language saddlestitched Rules Booklet; $24.99

Better known for their collectible miniatures games such as *MechWarrior: Dark Age* and *Heroclix* and their constructable strategy games like *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Rocketmen: Axis of Evil,* WizKids step away from all that to give us something both complete and self-contained. *Tsuro: The Game of the Path* is the publisher's first board game, one that matches the European model in terms of quality, and matches its simplicity of concept with a simplicity of play.

The concept is that the Dragon and the Phoenix share the guardianship of the paths of life, maintaining a careful equilibrium between the two forces of luck and destiny. Only by finding a balance between the two can you find the path to enlightenment. In *Tsuro,* this is reflected in the players having to find their way across the board, but curiously not to the other side. Indeed, a player does not want to find a path to the other or edge of the board, but rather he wants his opponents to do so. This will lose them the game, and if he can force this to happen by putting a path in front of them in front of an opponent -- which he *must* take -- then so much the better.

What strikes you first about *Tsuro* are the quality of its components, and the obvious thought that has gone into both its look and feel, all done in rich earthy shades of brown and following an Asian theme. The rules are beautifully presented on a fold out card sheet, a cover sheet sits below that on top of the fully mounted board, and below that are the nicely shaped playing markers, and the glossy, hardy tiles. The only downside to the components are the plainly presented rules given in Dutch, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish, and the playing markers. These eight, each in a different color and with a dragon motif stamped into them, are of cheap plastic. They just do not feel as if they match the quality of the rest of the game.

The board consists of a six-by-six grid of 2½-inch squares, the same size as the tiles. Each of the edge squares is marked with a pair of starting marks on the very edge. These starting marks align with the lines or paths that run across the tiles. Each tile is marked with four of these lines running to the sides of a tile to create a total of eight entry and exit points. Although the paths cross, they never connect across a tile, only from one tile to the next. The effect, as the tiles are laid out on the board, is to create a series of separate paths on which the players will never meet unless their paths are connected. It is important to note that each of the 35 tiles is different, but that they can all be laid out on the board to create a variety of paths and patterns. The 36th tile is an exception. The Dragon tile is used to indicate who draws the first after the draw pile is reshuffled.

Designed for two to eight players, a game begins with each player placing his marker on a starting mark and receiving a hand of three tiles. On his turn, a player selects one of these three and puts the tile down on a square next to his marker so that it increases the length of the path his marker is on. He then moves his marker along the new section of path to its open end. If another player has his marker on a path that is connected to and extended by the addition of this newly placed tile, then the marker is also moved along the path to its open end. In doing so, should a player's marker

be connected to a path that leads all the way off the board, then he must still follow it to the end. When his marker leaves the board, a player also leaves the game. The aim of the game then, is to force your opponents' markers off the board, while you try to stay on.

And that really is it. To win you must be the last player with a marker on the board. It is possible to have two winners, but only if everyone else has been eliminated and all of the tiles have been placed. There are enough tiles to fill the board bar a single square. Players can also be eliminated simultaneously, when their respective paths are connected, forcing their markers to follow each other's path back to the starting point and off the board. Of course, a player does not have to play a tile that will force him from the board unless no other move is possible, but when players' paths grow closer, it is highly probable. It is possible for there to be no winner, having played games in which every player is eliminated on a single turn leaving the board empty. This is more common with only a few players.

Tsuro is both easy to learn and understand. Although two can play, it is definitely a better game the more players are involved as there are more opportunities for rival paths to connect. A greater number of players also increases the playing time, but to no more than half an hour. Nor is it an easy game to win despite the simplicity. Rather it is an easier game to lose than it is to win, and to be fair, *Tsuro* is very, very light in terms of strategy. Which probably makes it too light for more than an occasional play by the serious gamer, being more of a side dish than a main course, making it better suited to a family audience. Even so, *Tsuro: The Game of the Path* is an enjoyable, attractive game that has been ably executed from concept to completion.

--Matthew Pook

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

Magi, Madmen, and Monsters

for *GURPS Cabal*

by Bevan Thomas

The Cabal is an ancient and mighty organization dealt with in the aptly named *GURPS Cabal.* It is a coalition of sorcerers, fringe mystics, and supernatural creatures dedicated to mutual support, the acquisition of power, and the exploration and mastery of the spiritual planes. The leaders of this august and monstrous society are the Grand Masters, beings of almost unspeakable cunning, power, and ruthlessness. *GURPS Cabal* deals with 13 of them, ranging from the calm and erudite John Dee to the vile and bloodthirsty Erzsebet Bathori and the darkly enigmatic Garravin. This article introduces nine more individuals who have managed to claw and fight their way up the hierarchy to become lords of the night. Though created for the Cabal, they can easily be incorporated into other horror settings as patrons or adversaries.

These Grand Masters were created with variety in mind. Figures from history rub shoulders with entirely new creations, relatively moral scholars feature alongside depraved monsters. The GM is expected to pick and choose which ones are right for his campaign, and of course even the ones he selects should be modified to serve the best purpose in his setting that they can. It is his Cabal, after all.

Adave

Adave ("Adam" + "Eve") is a peculiar Grand Master. It is the gestalt product of a pair of alchemists: William Trent and his sister Josephine. The twin siblings were minor nobility who lived in 17th-century England and devoted almost all of their time to hunting for the secrets of immortality.

They eventually devised a strange ritual that would result in a physical enactment of the alchemical marriage. If properly performed on a brother and his twin sister, it would transform the two into a single immortal being. Though the two were disturbed by the ramifications of such a ritual, they were too excited by the promise of immortality to pass it up. Therefore they brew the two elixirs, and when the time came, they linked their hands, clinked glasses as they toasted to the hope of immortality, and drank in unison.

And then what once was two suddenly became one.

Adave was born: Adam Kadamon incarnate, the holy hermaphrodite, the perfect union of the masculine and feminine. As soon as the transformation was complete, Adave destroyed all of its notes so that no one would be able to use the information to figure out how to separate the being into its original two forms. After this was done, it packed up its things and left to begin its new life.

It was soon located, contacted, and recruited by the Cabal. Many within the organization would do anything to find out exactly what ritual created Adave. However, the hermaphrodite's unique gestalt brain is virtually immune to any attempts to read, control, or otherwise manipulate it. Furthermore, its complete mastery over all conscious and unconscious bodily functions means that Adave can choose to temporarily "turn off" pain receptors in different parts of its body, making it immune to torture. It claims to have forgotten exactly what the ritual was, and the Cabal has no way of verifying that (something that frustrates Cabalists to no end).

Adave's existence as a transfigured being, its promise that if it ever remembers the ritual "the Cabal will be the first to know," and the insight its alleviated consciousness can give on a wide variety of situations allowed the being to rise within the Cabal's ranks and attain the position of Grand Master. Now it spends most of its time in research and quiet contemplation. Adave is a tranquil being, all the aspects of its body and mind having become perfectly balanced through the consumption of the elixir. It always responds to threats in a quiet and calm manner, which often makes it

pivotal in crisis situations.

Coaxoch

Coaxoch ("Serpent Flower") was an Aztec priestess who lived hundreds of years ago. She worshipped Tlazolteotl, "The Eater of Filth," goddess of sex and birth, and through her connected with Naber, aethyr of Akton. Believing Naber to be the "true Tlazolteotl," the priestess devoted herself to the aethyr's dogma of debauchery and self-mutilation of the soul.

However, the other priests declared Coaxoch's rituals to be an abomination, and they sealed her up in a cave as punishment. The priestess clawed at the rocks to no avail, and then pleaded with "Tlazolteotl" to save her. Naber appeared to Coaxoch in the form of the goddess and copulated with the woman in the darkness. Then for centuries, Coaxoch hung between life and death. Her body became mummified, preserved yet desiccated, and outside the Aztec Empire fell and the modern world grew up where the ziggurats and temples once stood.

Then, in 1920, a group of archaeologists uncovered the cave. As the sunlight hit Coaxoch's body, the priestess awoke into her undead existence and the mummy slowly rose from the ground. The archaeologists were destroyed in an orgy of blood and agony, and then Coaxoch walked down the mountain and into the new world.

It was not long before the Cabal snapped her up, recognizing that such a powerful and unstable sorceress should not be allowed to operate on her own. She soon found her niche exploring the darker areas of the occult, and has taken to Erzsbet Bathori, finding a kindred spirit in the Blood Countess. When not exploring the Four Realms with Naber as her guide, Coaxoch indulges her love of parties in which she seeks to outdo Marie Laveau for extravagance, Cagliostro for decadence, and Erzsbet for monstrosity. Though the priestess' true appearance is that of a leathery corpse, she usually employs her magic to change her body into a more pleasant form. However, it is rumored that certain people, such as the Countess, enjoy the mummy's true appearance, finding it . . . intense.

Crow

Perhaps the youngest Grand Master, Crow was born on November 7, 1981, in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. His name was Brandon MacKay, and for the first part of his life, he was a normal boy with a passing interest in literature and nature. All that changed in the nineteenth year when he decided to go camping on his own deep in the lush rainforests of BC.

It was on his third night that MacKay was found by the great eikone of hunger, a manifestation of Atrax's shadow, [Baxbakwalanuxsiwae](). This Northern spirit possessed MacKay, driving him mad and causing him to run screaming through the wilderness, hungry for blood. A month later, MacKay regained control. He was lying naked by a stream, his body covered in blood. He was not sure what exactly had happened to him during his insanity, but what he did know was that now he had become touched by the Cannibal and filled with its power. MacKay realized that he came from a long line of Kwakiutl shamans (or pepaxalai) on his mother's side, that the Cannibal had responded to his blood, and that he had been initiated into the way of the Hamatsa.

The new sorcerer named himself "Crow," and began to gather to himself all the occult forces of the Pacific Northwest Coast. As this is one of the parts of the world with little Cabal presence (not considered important enough by most Cabalists), it was relatively easy. Soon he had created treaties with the Sasquatch families, forced the obedience of the most prominent water monsters, made pacts with the various eikones, eidolons, and ultraterrestrials that frequent the area, and gained control over the province's ley-lines and places of power.

Then, three short years after his first encounter with the Cannibal, Crow announced himself to the powers that be. He showed up at a Cabal chapter-house and convinced a group of Grand Masters to meet with him behind closed doors. Few people know what was said, but what is known is that when Crow stepped out again, he had been declared one of them.

Crow has become the wild card amongst the politicking of the Cabal's Inner Circle. He is a maverick, a new recruit who's goals are either unknown or unestablished. This means that most of the other Grand Masters are trying to sway Crow to their side, taking advantage of what they perceive to be raw power directed by a naive and inexperienced mind. His eikone, the Cannibal, makes a lot of Cabalists uneasy, and some believe it might even be a demon in disguise. Many are nervously waiting to see what the pepaxalai's exact agenda is.

His "nest" is at the center of a winding labyrinth located underneath the city of Victoria. The length of the labyrinth is cared with runes from a multitude of different occult languages, and it adjoins Binah, Baxbakwalanuxsiwae's own realm, and some say the Abyss. It is strongly connected to Atrax, though here the decan has particularly dark overtones (hunger, gluttony, and the will to devour). Crow is often found meditating here, link to the paranormal energy of the Northwest Coast like a spider at the center of his mystic web.

Marlowe

Christopher "Kit" Marlowe was born on February 26, 1564 and said to die on May 30, 1593. The following centuries did not improve his temper. He was the most popular playwright of his day, one of his most famous pieces being the occult-heavy *Doctor Faustus,* and was secretly one of the most trusted Cabalists in the service of John Dee.

In order to increase his effectiveness as one of Dee's agents (and to deal with the various elements of Marlowe's "controversial" personal life which had been revealed), Marlowe faked his own [death], and left an inert homunculus in his place. Then he wandered around Europe, using his talents for subterfuge and art in the Cabal's service while indulging in his love of wine, men, and tobacco.

It was in 1610 when he encountered Erzsbet Bathori while investigating reports of vampirism in Hungary. The Blood Countess fell in love with the middle-aged rake, an attraction that Marlowe in no way returned. In an attempt to gain his fealty, Erzsbet turned Marlowe into a vampire and trapped him in her castle. However, he used his magic to escape and convince the King of Hungary to order he imprisoned.

Ever since, Marlowe has continued to do the Cabal's dirty work, and eventually became a Grand Master. For one of such a rank, he is incredibly "hands on," preferring to do the job himself if at all possible. He dislikes his vampiric state, though admits that it has certain advantages.

He is a consummate liar, rogue, and con-man. Only the following things are certain about him: he is loyal to John Dee, he hates Erzsbet Bathori, and he dislikes drinking female blood. Marlowe claims to have no ulterior motives, and is simply doing his best to "serve the Cabal's needs."

He's probably lying.

Myrddin

In 1941, during the Battle of Britain, a German bomber suffered a mechanical anomaly and accidentally dropped a bomb on a grove of trees near the town of Selkirk on the Scottish border. The bomb awoke the entity who had been slumbering under the grove for more than a thousand years. After the planes were gone, he walked out of his cave and came to the nearest Cabal chapter house to announce himself. Grand Master Myrddin, more commonly known as Merlin, had returned.

Few Grand Masters have as many contradictory legends around them. There was an Emrys Myrddin who was a member of the Cabal in the 6th century, and served as an advisor to the brother kings Ambrosius Aurelianus and Uther Pendragon, and to Uther's son Arthur. However, there was another Cabalist mage known as Myrddin Wyllt who lived a hundred years later in Wales, and wrote a series of prophesies while living as a hermit in the forest. At different times, the "modern" Myrddin has claimed to be either of these or both or none, and no one can figure out the truth of the matter.

Whatever his past, Myrddin is one of the Cabal's mightiest mages and famous for his ability to take on any form. He is strongly attuned to the decans Bianakith and Charchnoumis, and his favorite forms include an old man with a gray beard, a beautiful boy with golden hair, a large raven, a dark youth dressed entirely in black, and a huge, black mastiff. He is also a prophet, known for spouting cryptic predictions at odd moments.

Myrddin is obsessed with acquiring the "Four Artifacts of Britain," four magical items that correspond to the four suits of the Tarot deck. They are the Holy Grail (the cup), the Spear of Longinus (the wand), the sword Excalibur (the sword), and the Round Table (the disk). Myrddin's search for these artifacts, as well as his frequent visits to the realm of Camelot in Briah, might suggest that he is Emrys, but some people feel all this is misdirection, serving as a smokescreen for Myrddin's true goals. Besides, it's such a cliché for Cabalists, especially British ones, to quest for the Grail and the Spear that many feel doesn't add much to the "Emrys Myrddin" argument anyway.

Myrddin is a British nationalist, especially with regards to occultism. He is obsessed with "returning the flower of English sorcery," and makes no secret of his distaste for "foreign magic." He is on excellent terms with Adave, John Dee, and strangely enough, Garravin, as well as tolerating Erasmus Rooke, but has a talent for rubbing other Grand Masters the wrong way. There is especially bad blood between Myrddin and Dr. Fang, and neither Cabalist makes any secret of the scorn he feels for the other's methods.

Back in King Arthur's day, Emrys Myrddin had numerous contacts with Faerie. In fact, the trials and tribulations of the kingdom had been shaped by a shadow war between fae-attuned Cabalists, cumulating in Morgan the Fay's pact with the Unseelie Court and eventually overthrow of Arthur. This has caused many people to speculate on the exact reasons behind Myrddin's close friendship with Garravin. Some believe that Myrddin was friends with Garravin's father, or that the old fairy was Myrddin's father too, making Garravin and him half-brothers (after all, many people have claimed that Myrddin's father was a fairy or the Devil). Others have suggested that the two might actually be lovers. As both Myrddin and Garravin are infamous for their short tempers and imaginative punishments, most people only speculate well out of earshot.

Poe

He is the creator of modern detective fiction and the master of the gothic short story, his life read like one of his own horror yarns, and his death was wrought with confusion and mystery. And yet, his waking life paled in comparison to the life Edgar Alan Poe lived when he slept, for he was a member of the ancient sect of dream-warriors known as the Benandanti.

Born on January 19, 1809, with his birth caul still on his face, Poe was blessed with psionic powers, particularly the "Sight" (detecting and communicating with spirits) and the ability to Dream Travel (p. CB99). With these powers came the responsibility of doing battle in the Dreamworlds against the Malandanti, dark witches in the service of demons who wish to gain control over the dreams of humanity. By night Edgar Allan Poe fought them, and by day he wrote stories of madness and terror as a form of catharsis. He hoped that by expressing in fiction the insanity he constantly faced, he would be able to purge it from his mind, and remain sane himself.

For a while it worked, but Poe earned many enemies. Chief among them was Loruhamah, prince of the howling night, chief among the demons who feed on nightmares. Eventually Loruhamah's agents managed to enter the waking world and target Poe while he was at his most vulnerable. It was on October 7, 1849 that the author and dream warrior was found dead. Though the medical verdict was alcohol poisoning, he was in fact struck down by demons. While they killed his body, they did not kill his soul, for just before death Poe's dream self was able to flee to Nod, and from there into Atziluth.

It was 40 years later when Poe was next seen. An Italian Cabalist dreamed that Poe warned him of an upcoming invasion of nightmare demons. Fortunately, the Cabalist believed him, and contacted his superiors, and the threat was averted.

And so Poe became part of the Cabal, and so pivotal has he become that the dream warrior is now a Grand Master. He also still remains in contact with the Benandanti, and makes no secret of his disgust of much the Cabal's activities. Poe

only associates with the Cabal because he feels that only the resources of this vast organization are able to hold back Loruhamah and his minions, it is the lesser of two evils.

Poe has no real existence outside Nod and the Dreamworlds. He is one of the few people able to navigate the various Dreamworlds successfully, and can jump from dreamer to dreamer with surprising ease. He is generally in Nod when not communicating with his associates. For communication, he prefers to speak to them while they dream, though the Cabal has devised special crystals that Poe can "possess" and speak out of if necessary.

Rasputin

Few Grand Masters are viewed with more fear and awe than Grigori Yefimovich Rasputin, known as the "Mad Monk" and the "Holy Devil." He was born in a small Siberian village on January 10th, 1869, and had a relatively uneventful existence for the first 30 years of his life. However, while on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, he gained various supernatural powers, particularly in the realms of prophecy and healing. Most occultists believe that these powers were psionic in nature, but to Rasputin they were always gifts from God.

It was in 1903 that he returned to his homeland, becoming a famous healer. In 1905, Rasputin was brought to the court of the Tsar in order to heal his son's hemophilia, and though Rasputin did not completely cure Tsarevich Alexei, he was able to sooth the boy's suffering. He became part of the court, and eventually was appointed the person advisor to Alexei's mother, Tsarina Alexandra.

In 1916, a group of nobles became disgusted with Rasputin's prominence at court and sought to assassinate him. They invited the mystic for dinner, and fed him cakes and wine laced with cyanide. Unaffected by the poison, Rasputin was than shot many times by the conspirators. Rasputin's healing powers allowed him to withstand much of the attack, and he fled, intending to go to the Tsarina. In desperation, the assassins clubbed Rasputin into unconsciousness, cut a hole in the ice of the Neva River, and stuffed him into the freezing waters.

Three days later, the body was recovered and buried. However, that was not the end of Grigori Yefimovich Rasputin. While his body languished in the hole, Rasputin's ka was thrust into the realms of the spirit, and Rasputin's body toppled to the ground. Like a shooting star, his ka fell towards the Abyss, and Rasputin claims that there he confronted Choronzon, Breaker of Thought and Form. It is said that the Mad Monk defeated the powerful demon guardian and entered Daath, the hidden 11th sephirah, the "worm that gnaws." It is said that the Mad Monk learned the secrets of Daath and used them to enter Atziluth and stand naked before the Godhead. It is said that Rasputin then returned to his body as an enlightened and mighty soul. Many people say these things, primarily Rasputin and his followers, but other Cabalists are less sure. Some believe that the man fell into the Abyss, where his soul was devoured, and it was a demon that returned and dressed itself in Rasputin's skin.

Rasputin, if it was Rasputin, awoke exactly three weeks, three days, and three hours after his "death," his body having completely repaired itself. Then he clawed his way to the surface and walked off.

After his betrayal and "murder," the Holy Devil decided to devote all his time to the Cabal. He soon became a Grand Master, and attracted to him a large body of supporters. When not slaking his legendary lusts on female disciples, Rasputin devotes virtually all of his time to exploring the Spirit Realms, particularly the Abyss and the hypothetical sephirah Daath. If Daath does not exist, as many Cabalists believe, then Rasputin is simply continually sending his ka into the realm of demons, an image that horrifies many fellow occultists. In fact, a group is being formed, a cabal within the Cabal, that believes Rasputin needs to be destroyed before he drags all of the order into the Abyss with him, and they are currently trying to figure out how to destroy Rasputin before it is too late.

Rasputin claims to have taken Shaliah, Lady of Material Happiness and aethyr of Phthenoth, as a lover, and it is at least true that Rasputin seems able to regenerate from virtually any wound. Some people claim that the Mad Monk was once completely burnt and his ashes scattered, but that the ashes eventually drifted together and reformed into his body. This may be an exaggeration, but certainly he has been shot, burnt, poisoned, and cursed numerous times, but has always recovered. Many people once witnessed him being decapitated, but then his body calmly reached down to his fallen head, placed it back on his neck, and he was then good as new. As most Cabalists are obsessed with

immortality, many are desperate to know how Rasputin has achieved this, and this is one of the reasons why he has so many initiates pledging loyalty to him. However, so far Rasputin has told no one his secrets.

Though Rasputin is a fairly solitary individual (when not making appearances to his supporters), he has developed connections with Grand Masters from his area of the world. He has at least a working relationship with the demigod Koschei the Deathless, and is known to have occasionally been "intimate" with Oleupata Horsekiller. Thanks to his regeneration, the Mad Monk is one of the few people who can cope with the Scythian priestess' rages.

Sophia

It is well known by occultists that the great alchemist and theologian Albertus Magnus once created a homunculus that so disturbed his pupil, Thomas Aquinas, that the young man eventually smashed the creature to pieces. What is less well known is that in 1255, Albertus constructed a new homunculus, a female that he named Sophia.

When Sophia heard what had happened to her "brother," she was filled with fear and fled the alchemist's house. She wandered over Europe, hunting for a place where she could feel safe, where she would be treated not as an abomination or an object but as a real being. She was eventually found by the Cabalistic lodge known as the Brethren of the Lambent Flame, and was inducted into the group.

Now, after hundreds of years, Sophia has become a force to be reckoned with within the Cabal. Unlike many other Grand Masters, her goals are entirely material. She has no interest in occult study or exploration of the Realms. All she wants is to create a world safe for nonhumans.

Sophia is by far the most vocal nonhuman activist within the Cabal. And by her definition, someone is only a nonhuman if he or she was never part of humanity. Sophia couldn't care less about undead like Elzsbet Bathori, and even shapeshifters like Athene du Sarrazin are a little too human for her taste. Instead she associates with such creatures as the Serpent-Lord Kaas'sth'raa, the fae noble Garravin, and other even stranger beings.

She often demands that various creatures be reclassified as "people" and champions for members of numerous species to be accepted into the Cabal. Her current pet goal is the appointment of a troll Grand Master, which she feels is necessary for the "protection and recognition of a wise and noble species which has suffered much from human bigotry and hate." Certain Cabalists feel that Sophia intends to eventually perform a coup against the Cabal, purging it of all its human members. Sophia dismisses such claims as "attempts at fearmongering by the speciest status quo."

Dr. Taylor

Susan Taylor is perhaps the greatest purely scientific mind the Cabal has to offer. Openly disdainful of what she perceives as the randomness and unreliability of magic, she is determined to prove that science and mathematics have the power to analyze, measure, and define the metaphysical as well as they do the physical.

Her studies and inventions have helped the Cabal immensely, and it is a testament to her genius that she has managed to rise so high in an organization while simultaneously deriding the philosophy on which the organization was formed.

A year ago, she was a Philosopher happily going about her work, but then disaster struck. Dr. Taylor had developed a device that she felt would allow her to look deep into Briah, and possibly even gaze upon Atziluth itself. Unfortunately, she must have made an error in her calculations somewhere, for when the machine was turned on, it ripped a hole in reality and from that gash flew a qlippothic swarm. Two of Taylor's assistants were torn to pieces before the monsters were driven back and the hole was closed. Before the swarm was banished, one of the monsters stung Taylor's left hand and injected something into her skin.

Susan Taylor was unconscious for three weeks, entrapped by visions of destruction and chaos, of the Vale of Hinnom, of a possible Apocalypse, and of what she thinks might be the "first draft" of Creation. When she awoke, Taylor discovered that the wound left by the qlippoth had developed a gray-green growth. After some intense study, she

realized that it was qlippothic matter, that a piece of "God's garbage pit" was growing on her body.

Taylor is both fascinated and repulsed by the situation. After various attempts to banish the qlippothic material failed, Taylor convinced her superiors that this may be a blessing in disguise. This growth and the accompanied visions permit a unique analysis of qlippothic matter and the First Creation, information that could prove invaluable to the Cabal. Having appealed to the organization's lust for knowledge, Taylor was allowed to embark on her study of the growth. However, she was warned that if she ever appeared a threat, she would be treated without mercy.

Over the last year, Dr. Taylor's studies have added much to the study of the qlippoth, and her visions have helped counteract attempted invasions from the Vale of Hinnom. Susan Taylor has become so pivotal to the Cabal that she now holds the position of Grand Master, and continues with her studies to use science to map the Realms and plump the depths of the Abyss.

The growth has now spread over Susan Taylor's entire left arm, covering it in a gray-green chitinous shell, and is starting to spread over her body. When Taylor isn't paying attention, the arm sometimes does things of its own according, such as the fingers clenching and unclenching or moving in a way that certain Cabalists feel is some indecipherable alien sign-language. She generally hides the arm with a long sleeve and glove, and it has greatly disturbed many Cabalists. There are those that fear she has become a sleeper agent for the qlippoth, and needs to be destroyed before she destroys the Cabal and perhaps even the world.

The Last Resort of Kings

Violence as a Storytelling Tool

by Michael Dewar

The less historically hip reader may be forgiven for thinking that the above title refers to a little island paradise just south of Mauritius, favored by royalty from around the world, but it doesn't. This is about violence -- the roleplaying equivalent, not the kind with real blood and real prison sentences.

This isn't about combat. There are millions of pages in official rulebooks and outside them detailing the correct modifier for a sharpshooter standing on a wet elephant with a toy catapult, trying to hit a dragon's left nostril. The stats have been done.

This is about violence in the context of a *story,* a few comments and tips to players and DMs about how it can be used to further the plot, or enhance themes, or other Poncy Literary Things.

Aggressive Self-Defense: Reactive Violence

An awful lot of roleplaying violence falls into this category. Your PCs are mincing along through a forest, with nothing more aggressive planned than flower-arranging or writing poetry, and they are suddenly attacked by 1d6 Orc Bandits, who they brutally kill, loot and use the gained XP to level up in preparation for the 1d8 Dire Wolves waiting around the bend. They probably eat a pie or two afterwards.

Or a Crazed Evil Genius tries to blow up New York/Paris/The World/Texas, and our heroes stomp him. Or Texas (depending on your definition of "heroic"). There's nothing intrinsically wrong with the scenario, mind you. Players don't usually want to play total bastards who perform random, unprovoked acts of violence on the relatively innocent (although there are exceptions). They want someone else to throw the first punch, snarl "Draw!" through gritted teeth, or kidnap Fair Marion.

Unfortunately, this can turn fighting into that formulaic, 1d6-Orcs scenario discussed above. Unless the characters are in a literal war zone, they shouldn't be used to being periodically attacked for no immediate reason. If it does happen, it should be panicked and tense and unexpected. This is not the time to lay out a hex map and advance your fighters to attack while the party mage readies a fireball. It's time to grab your sword and attack the nearest foe, probably shouting, "What the hell is going on? Die you bastard, die!" Hopefully that last line refers to the enemy you're fighting, though it might also refer to the moron who was supposed to be on watch.

Unfortunately, as characters get tougher, it gets harder to shake them up. 1d6 Red Dragons launching a sneak-attack is somewhat less common, not to mention a little hard to miss. It is, however, still possible to shake them up without bringing in ever-tougher foes.

Think about it in terms of comfort zones. If the characters are comfortable facing down a gang of Orcs or Ventrue Ghouls in combat when well-armed and expecting it, then what about when they're unarmed? Asleep? On their way to the privy? Of course, this can get overused. Players can feel taken advantage of or -- even worse -- end up going to the bathroom armed.

Fortunately, you can always play up the opposite extreme. If a high-powered group gets attacked by those 1d6 Orcs, it doesn't have to be a boring event. You can play up how effortless it is, how two of the Orcs realize what a bad mistake they've made and try to run away, how the characters switch swords to their off-hands for more of a challenge, and similar nonsense. It's a fun interlude from more serious combats with The World At Stake. The same might apply to a drunken cowboy who gets his gun blown out of his hands by your seasoned Wild West quick-draw artist. The fight

remains memorable, even if it wasn't tough.

Ideally, that's what you want to aim for. Most people who've been in a fight (even in a large number of them), will remember every moment for the rest of their lives. That's what you want every time blood is spilled.

The Lone Gunman: Premeditated Violence

On the other hand, sometimes the PCs land the first punch. They raid a facility, plan an assassination, or creep up on a camp of Orcs.

Now is the time that the hex grid becomes a bit more helpful. The problem with combat maps is that they tend to turn even the most mild-mannered unaggressive PC into a rogue SWAT officer. ("You lay down suppressing fire across C11-15, and I'll move around behind him to A5. Everyone else, get ready for the Pincer Maneuver next round!") Sometimes that is appropriate, but often it isn't.

A nice trick is to let PCs use the map to plan their attack, and then take it away as soon as the first die is rolled. As many military types have commented, no plan survives first contact with the enemy. Even if players complain that they're not sure what's going on from your descriptions, remember that real fights are *disorientating.* If some psycho is trying to carve his name on your forehead with an icepick, little details like the furniture around you fade away by comparison. If players start saying, "Hang on. So I'm at the door, and Jeff is to my left, and the gunman is behind a barrel to *his* left . . ." then tell them they're taking a round to survey the scene and *then* let them get a more detailed description, assuming they're still alive.

Besides the mechanics of planning and structure versus the ugly reality of battle, the other important issue with premeditated violence is that it is just that: premeditated. Carefully planning to kill someone or something is far colder and nastier than, say, hitting back because this guy's coming at you with a knife . . . and suddenly the knife is in your hands and there's arterial spray all down the wall . . . gain 10 XP. Some characters might be able to cope with murder for self defense, but not to further their own goals. Others might happily cap their enemy with a hunting rifle from 500 meters and then go out for a burger.

While some systems try to model this (***Vampire's*** Humanity, ***Unknown Armies'*** Violence Checks and similar Bad-O-Meters), a handy little exercise to measure your character's tolerance for carnage runs as follows. First off, has the character ever killed someone? If it's happened in game, this is a matter of history, not roleplaying. However, this is not necessarily the case with newer characters. Remember, even professionals seen traditionally as violent or aggressive (such as the police or military) may never have taken a life. Hundreds of soldiers retire without ever having fired a shot in anger. Obviously if your character hasn't killed before, then the first death is a major roleplaying opportunity. This doesn't have to mean screaming "Wwwhhhy?!" at the heavens as the violins reach crescendo -- it might be shaky hands, or dry heaves, or just insisting that, "We should bury him. You're supposed to bury people."

Secondly, there's a little roleplaying exercise you can try: Imagine your character is confronted by his worst enemy -- the major antagonist of the campaign, or perhaps a less important NPC who has just pushed *all* the wrong buttons. The enemy hands him a gun and says, "Shoot me. You won't get in trouble. The cops will never find out. If you don't, things will continue exactly as they are." How your character might act can give you a good idea about their overall attitude to violence.

You Wouldn't Like Me When I'm Angry: Frenzied, Unplanned Violence

Of course, not all violence is so calculated. Sometimes you just spring a brain leak and start hitting until you can't hit any more. Some systems allow for this with frenzy checks or berserking or something similar. The problem is that a die roll then dominates what could be a seriously intense and interesting piece of roleplaying. It's very easy to say, "Oh, I failed," and let the GM turn you into a NPC for a few rounds until the red mist parts, or to say, "Oh, I passed," and continue on your way, emotionally vapor-locked.

The dice shouldn't be law. If you fail and there's a decent amount of player-DM trust, then you should play out your own panic or frenzy, so long as you play to character as opposed to achieving your party goals ("But I'm really *angry* as I do it!"). If you pass, that doesn't mean your character can't freak out to a lesser degree, or wrestle with his/her emotions for a moment. The same can also apply for fear and sanity-related checks: if you pass a SAN check in *Call of Cthulhu* as a human head slithers down a corridor towards you, riding a wave of slimy tentacles, it means you don't go totally barmy. It doesn't mean that you just go, "Oh. How weird," and reach for the dynamite.

The dice should assist in roleplaying your character's emotions, not trap you into a binary situation of "freaked" or "unfreaked."

Guns, Lots of Guns: Weapons and Violence

Often in campaigns, there's a point when the DM has laid out an objective and asked how you prepare to deal with it. You've got to infiltrate the spy base, burn down the elder's haven, or pillage the dungeon.

But first, you go shopping. It's roleplaying fact that if players get presented with a suitable array of weapons and tools and a clear objective, then in-character gaming goes out the window and is replaced by the Grocery List From Hell: "I'll take a shotgun, with Dragonsbreath ammo, and an Uzi . . . no, two Uzis . . . and a Beretta, and a katana . . . and can we get Semtex?"

Once the first thrill of "Oh! I've got so many guns!" wears off, it gets boring. After all, this is a fantasy world (as in make-believe, not necessarily sword-and-sorcery). You can have as large and distressingly phallic a selection of weapons as your DM can imagine, but in the end, it's just boys with toys (though let the record reflect, some girls go just as completely overboard when gun-shopping' it's not just about shoes any more . . .).

How much cooler is it to pull off a big robbery or assault with *limited* resources, where every bullet or arrow counts, then when you're strapped like Arnie in any movie you choose to name (Except *Twins, Jingle All The Away,* and the awful one where he's pregnant). Even the army doesn't hand out guns like candy, so why should your NPCs?

Even if it makes sense to have a wide selection, or if you're playing *Feng Shui* (in which case about 20 guns per person is the average load), at least try to go shopping in-character. Think of the cool "lock and load" movie moments you've seen, and then filter that through your character. Maybe that means picking up weapons with cool precision, test-firing and loading and re-loading them before shoving them into your trenchcoat, or maybe it means picking up a gun and complaining that it doesn't work ("It's called a safety, sir.").

I've Got a Secret, Beat Me 'Til I Talk: Violence as Torture

Every now and again, the characters take one alive. Maybe it's a minor NPC who survived by sheer luck, or maybe they charged in with tranq rifles and attitude, but now there's a prisoner. Sometimes, it's just a random NPC who you didn't even bother to name, and sometimes it's a major antagonist who is just too damn tough to crack (since he knows too much and would spoil your plot if he blabbed). But every once in a while, an interrogation can be part of the plot and prove to be a powerful dramatic device.

In that case, it all comes down to personal taste. First off, a morality comment. Torture is every bit as nasty, if not nastier than premeditated murder -- not only are you committing acts of sadism, but the victim is left alive to scream about how much it hurts afterwards. There's a reason why the *Unknown Armies* stress system ranks torture as only slightly less traumatizing than point-blanking a bound, helpless person in the back of the head. This is stuff for very desperate or very ruthless characters. Which doesn't mean it's not fun . . . in a game, that is.

Anyway, torture can swing between two extremes. In the first, as typified by most noir movies, the character grabs his snitch and basically slams him against the wall until he confesses. It's pretty bloodless, though it can make for good drama. Another favorite is the inevitable Russian Roulette gambit. This isn't advisable unless you're playing one of the more "cinematic" systems, or you're actually comfortable that there's a 1-in-6 chance that you're going to lose all the

valuable plot points in the snitch's brain as it splatters across the floor.

In the second extreme, it's time to bring on the long painful hours, the needle-nose pliers, the vat of acid and collection of sandpaper . . . you sick puppy. Arguably more realistic and certainly bloodier, this can still go badly wrong. The main problem is that players get carried away. Not necessarily in a bad, sweat-stained psychopathic way, but the torturing of an NPC (or PC, maybe) becomes a logical puzzle as opposed to a gutwrenching experience ("Okay, so I break his wrist. He doesn't talk. Then I break the other wrist. Still nothing. Okay, so I pick up a big knife and start peeling the skin off his neck. And then I pour chili sauce over it.")

For some characters that kind of extremism and clinical detachment can fit well (Sabbat characters in *Vampire,* raise your hands now!), but for most, that kind of sadism just isn't fun. Unless they're . . . well, sadists.

Ideally, you want to strike a balance between a few scary and/or gruesome moments and over-the-top anatomy lessons. Obviously if you just turn it into an Intimidation roll, you're short-changing the chance for characters to show their darker side and menace a little, but if the game starts to get sucked into a careful list of brutal acts (possibly numbered), it's best to say, "Okay. You torture him for a few hours with the ferret, sandpaper and jelly mould. He screams an awful lot, but doesn't talk. Let's move on."

Unnecessary Evils: Inappropriate Violence

Something to watch, particularly with new roleplayers, is the tendency to escalate matters into violence far too quickly. This isn't that surprising . . . after all, this is a made-up game. These random NPCs exist only as fragments of description and stats on paper. Why not waste the bastards if you're irritable/tired/bored/frustrated?

At the end of the day, it comes down to considering what a reasonable person might do. Most reasonable people wouldn't respond to minor irritation, like having a drink spilled on them or being ignored in a conversation, with violence. Neither should your characters. It's helpful to imagine a few bystanders who are outside the potential conflict. What is their reaction? Are they shocked? Do they feel you're justified? Maybe they would even join in . . .

Of course, that assumes that you're playing *reasonable* characters. If your character has a hair-trigger temper or is a stone-cold sociopath, then he might well respond to a casual insult by breaking someone's nose. But in that case, the DM and other players are probably expecting (because of your character's general concept and demeanor), to deal with circumstances where ripping someone's arm *is* the last word in an argument. Except for "Aaarrrgh! My arm! My arm!", of course.

I Am The Law: Violence and Law

Last, not least, violence is illegal in most societies. Of course, the degree of illegality varies: Sometimes you get life in prison, sometimes you can get off with, "The dirty varmint dealt five aces, sheriff!"

Generally, in a modern world, violence leads to police and jail time. Covering it up or running away after the fact may be even more challenging than winning the damn fight was. As you go further back in time, violence becomes more and more acceptable, and the margin for "justifiable homicide" gets wider and wider.

Still, even in a virtually lawless society, violence should not be without consequences. If you slaughter a rival in a fair duel in the town square, people who hear about it will react to you. They may respect your fighting mettle, or they may cross the street to avoid you, or even demand you recount every adrenalin-soaked moment at the local tavern.

They're not going to look at you in the same light as they did before the fight, though.

Conclusion

Earlier, the idea of a comfort zone was mentioned. Serious violence should almost never be inside your characters'

comfort zones. They might be able to deal with it, to respond calmly and practically, but they're still not going to be blasé about it.

In essence, violence changes lives. Sometimes, of course, it ends them. Other times, it may change the way the characters view the world. Maybe they're less naïve or more battle-hardened, or maybe they wake up from screaming nightmares and suffer Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. What it doesn't do is get glossed over into part of everyday existence.

Adventurous Professions: The Merchant

for *GURPS*

by Matt Riggsby

In Medieval Europe, society was divided into those who worked (peasant farmers and other food producers), those who fought (knights and other professional warriors, who were inevitably temporal authorities as well), and those who prayed (priests and monks). A number of societies farther east recognized very similar categories, but they added one more very important one: those who bought and sold.

In those days, the simple act of taking goods from one place to another was itself an adventure. Merchants have historically been the world's greatest travelers. Missionaries, pilgrims, and soldiers might visit distant lands, but few adopted travel as a lifestyle. It was the merchants who would go somewhere, return home, and go there again if there was profit in it. And if there wasn't, they'd just go somewhere else instead. Consequently, merchants saw -- and had to fight or talk their way through -- more of the strange and exotic than anyone else. They were also a potential threat to entrench elites. They could bring disruptive ideas from abroad or come up with them on their own, and use their immense wealth, sometimes rivaling that of the traditional landowning nobility, to promote their own goals. To sum up: a class of potentially intellectually dangerous wealthy people who traveled great distances usually only covered by fanatical pilgrims and large armies in search of unusual things to bring back home. If you can't make interesting characters out of that, you're just not trying. It's not just an adventure; it's a job!

Buying

On the surface, what merchants do is simple: get things which people who live elsewhere don't have, go there, trade them for different things which people who live where you do don't have, go home, sell (for a healthy profit, with any luck), and repeat. Simple to say, but hard to do, and that's where the adventure lies.

Getting together a cargo large or valuable enough to make it worthwhile to transport is no mean feat. Large landlords might produce enough wine or fine ale to fill a ship's hold, but beyond that, few individuals can produce enough by themselves to make regular trading expeditions worthwhile. Merchants buy from craftsmen and producers of raw materials to amass stockpiles for trading. That in itself is difficult enough, since cash was in relatively short supply for much of history. It would take a vast fortune for one person to fill a ship or a caravan by himself.

However, traveling merchants rarely work entirely with their own money. Most form some kind of partnership, with the traveling merchant taking most of the physical risks (and getting a larger share of the profits) and one or more investors putting up most of the capital for the expedition. For example, a young, vigorous, and merely Wealthy merchant might put up as large a sum of money as he can come up with while a Filthy Rich Patron provides three times as much. The poorer merchant would make the trip away and back, and at the end he and his wealthier partner would split the profits equally. Such arrangements go as far back as the Bronze Age; the rulers of Mesopotamian city-states commissioned merchants to engage in trade on their behalf using royal wealth. The merchants got the funding they needed, while the aristocrats could make money without dirtying their hands with trade.

Traveling merchants often band together to outfit trading expeditions. For example, a group of merchants might share the cost of hiring a ship or organize an itinerary for a caravan, with the major players electing a leader, paying for guards, and setting a schedule to suit their needs and the weather. The contribution a merchant makes to a common fund is reflected in his authority and the resources he gets to use. For example, merchants engaging a ship typically divide its cargo capacity by the number of sailors the vessel requires. Each merchant gets a number of shares of cargo space equal to the number of sailors he supports (more or less; the owner of the ship retains a share, and the sailors themselves are allowed small allotments).

Shipping

When planning a journey, merchants must balance the mode of transport, distance to travel, how self-sufficient the expedition must be, and potential dangers and delays, both natural and human, along the way. Although some clear preferences can arise, this can become a very complex equation.

Under reasonably good conditions, a TL3 ship on the sea travels on average 30 to 40 miles a day. A vessel on the river is a bit slower, going about 20-30 miles per day. Larger ships require less labor per ton of cargo than smaller ones. As a rule of thumb, a small ship (under 50 tons cargo capacity), suitable for traveling most rivers and short-range coastal tradem requires one sailor per half-ton of capacity. Larger, ocean-going vessels (over 50 tons capacity) require one sailor per ton of cargo. Large vessels can often reach 150 tons of capacity, not counting space for passengers. Crewmen, both sailors and any additional men-at-arms merchants might want to bring along, are paid about $23 a day.

A caravan might cover eight to 10 miles a day; 11 or 12 would be a notably good pace. A smaller expedition on which discipline could be more tightly enforced might make as many as 15. Larger beasts of burden (camels, oxen, and large donkeys) carry about 500 pounds each and require a handler for every four or five animals, with each handler and animal likewise costing about $23 a day.

An important complicating factor is that these *average* speeds aren't necessarily *typical* speeds. Travel at low TLs is notoriously unpredictable, often interrupted by starts and stops. Any number of things can (and often do) slow an expedition down, and absolutely perfect conditions can speed sea-going vessels up enormously. A few fast galleys have gone as far as 130 miles in a single day, but that's very much an exception. The only thing a merchant can count on is being unable to predict how long a journey will take.

Self-sufficiency can be another factor. All those sailors, guards, and animals have to eat and drink, and carrying those provisions can put a serious dent in a ship's cargo capacity. Including packing material such as wine bottles and water barrels, a day's food and water weigh six to eight pounds per person, and up to 100 pounds for each beast of burden (although about 30 pounds is more likely if water and grass are available along the way). If that ship with 100 sailors was also carrying 50 merchants, servants, and other assistants for a total complement of 150, it could carry all the provisions it needed, but those would take up nearly a quarter of its cargo capacity. Seagoing merchants, therefore, often stay fairly close to the coast both for ease of navigation and so that they can resupply frequently. Merchants traveling overland may travel roundabout routes through more-or-less civilized areas where they can get provisions rather than take short-cuts through uninhabited wastelands. Of course, adventurers may decide to take riskier, less-traveled paths, hoping to shave time off of their journey and get first pick at market.

Physical dangers of travel are fairly obvious. Although major trading expeditions are planned for calm months, weather is inherently unpredictable, so droughts, storms, unseasonable heat and cold, and, for sea travel, poor winds are always possibilities, with other natural hazards such as mosquitoes and disease as complicating factors. They might not wipe out an expedition (although they can and do from time to time), but they can certainly slow it down.

Bandits on land and pirates at sea are always possible, and downright likely in regions experiencing war or economic problems. Strength in numbers is the best way to reduce the danger, providing yet another reason to band together. Pirates and bandits only attack merchants they think they can beat, so the larger the caravan or the more heavily manned the ship, the less likely it is to be attacked. Smaller, faster caravans and ships are certainly options for a daring international merchant merchant, but they practically invite an attack.

Less obvious are the legal and political dangers. In most places, foreigners have few if any legal rights. They can be heavily taxed, robbed, beaten, and possibly even killed with impunity unless they arrange legal protection beforehand, or at least hire enough local protection to keep anyone from trying anything funny. Considerable diplomatic effort is expended to secure protection for visiting merchants along their routes and at their destinations, with merchants themselves often acting as diplomats. A hostile ruler can seriously damage a merchant's career simply by refusing him safe passage through his realm, or merely postponing an audience with him to discuss the issue. Of course, a clever merchant might want to persuade a ruler to give that treatment to his rivals.

Selling

Once the merchant arrives at his destination, the work of buying and selling began. Because of the size and value of the cargoes involved, this is not a quick process. It's unlikely that any single buyer can purchase a merchant's entire cargo, and even if he did, it might take quite some time for him to raise the money to pay for it. A merchant will spend weeks or months at his destination, feeling out the market, finding customers, and negotiating with both buyers of his goods and sellers of goods to take back with him.

This may require far more than just skills for buying and selling. In most societies, people strongly prefer to have a relationship with the people they do business with, so the merchant needs be able to operate in an alien environment and make and keep new friends. This may require cultural familiarity, language skills, and any number of social skills. A merchant's local contacts are most likely other merchants, but will also include clergy, aristocrats, and government officials, who are both potential customers and people who may need to be negotiated with in order to get permission to import and export goods. However, he might also cultivate the acquaintance of porters, gossips, harlots, and other people who can provide street-level assistance and unfiltered news on local conditions.

In a merchant-centric campaign, the GM may want to adopt a more detailed procedure than described in the Merchant skill description. Instead of a flat 10% adjustment to "fair value" in favor of the winner, modify the price by 2% for every point by which the winner succeeds.

It's not impossible to sell large quantities of goods quickly or in an unfamiliar place. It is, though, difficult to get a good price for them. Cultural familiarity penalties apply to Merchant skill, but some advantages may help offset that, to reflect the aid of local intermediaries and advice. Reduce the cultural unfamiliarity penalty by one if the merchant has a Claim to Hospitality in the area or by two if he has an appropriate Contact or Ally available (a local nobleman or merchant would qualify; a beggar or soldier would not).

Large transactions take time, so a merchant may want to try to sell his goods in small lots rather than all at once. For every full five times the campaign world's starting wealth in goods a merchant wants to sell, he's at -1 to Merchant skill. For example, if starting wealth is $1,000 and a merchant is trying to sell a chest containing $12,000 of saffron, he's at -2. This penalty can be partially offset if the merchant takes more time to coax his customer into a large transaction and wait for him to gather the cash. For every week he continues negotiation, reduce the penalty for the size of the transaction by one. The GM may require rolls against other social skills to reflect the merchant's attempts to keep in touch with his potential customer, or simply require that any social interaction leading up to continued bargaining be played out.

While he is away from home, the merchant has to find a place to live. If merchants from one city regularly trade in another, they might establish a permanent enclave as part of the arrangements which provide them with legal protections. They might then employ locals as permanent factors or even station their own people as long-term residents.

However, such arrangements might not always be available; it takes a lot of trade to make permanent agents feasible. Total strangers to the region might have to rely on inns (which some historical societies don't have) and charitable hostels. Travelers might also look for expatriate members of their religion or ethnic group. A Christian merchant from, say, 9th-century Constantinople might find a place to stay among the Christian enclave in predominantly Muslim Basra.

Eventually, the merchant packs his bags and go home, repeating the process of the previous months: gather up a bunch of goods, undertake a risky journey, and find customers at the other end of the journey. A merchant typically carries goods rather than sacks of cash on both legs of the journey. After all, why carry gold when you can carry merchandise of equivalent value which might be traded for even *more* gold? Instead, imported goods are exchanged directly for other goods or sold for money which goes to pay for more goods for the return trip.

And what eventually happens to all of the money? Profits that don't go back into the business are probably spent on the trappings of high living: fine clothes, large houses, excellent wine, books, jewelry, and so on. Even if they don't

formally have high status, merchants will -- if they can afford it -- live like they do and associate with those who do. In time, the wealthiest merchants tended to attempt a transition away from trade. Though lucrative, it was nevertheless risky and often not socially respectable. The wealthiest of the wealthy, therefore, might leave the dirty work to others and quietly try to become the sort of landed aristocrat whom they would someday come to replace.

Building A Merchant

A universal feature of merchants is that they have a practical education. They may not all be intellectuals and philosophers, but they're certainly literate and numerate, and therefore probably smarter than average. They're also relatively well-off. They have to be, after all, in order to buy and sell, although because of the risks of trade, it's easy for a merchant to overextend himself and run up debts.

But despite their wealth, merchants have usually been in a socially disadvantaged position. In many societies, exchange has been seen as a zero-sum game. Someone capable of turning a profit off of what should be an exchange of equal values would therefore seem at least a little shifty, if not downright dishonest. In such societies, including ancient Rome and many Asian societies, merchants could be rich and even powerful, but remain disreputable (probably the case for merchants in Sahud). It's by no means universal (Venice's Medicis made a smooth transition from merchant bankers to nobility), but it is quite common.

A merchant's most important skills are people skills. Merchant is the obvious skill to have, but that alone won't do it. Merchants must also be able to make and maintain social relationships which will enable them to create commercial relationships as well, make their way around the foreign ports they trade in, favorably impress the authorities by whose sufferance they were allowed to trade, and allay fears of foreign counterparts who would probably prefer to deal with people who shared their language, religion, and ethnicity.

Finally, a merchant will have the skills of the trail. Most merchants have spent a little time on the road. While they may have a taste for finer things, but just about all of them have spent days walking though trackless wastes or on the decks of ships and nights at inns or relatives' houses far from home. They are nothing if not worldly.

Templates

Merchant   *50 points*

This template is appropriate for a relatively minor merchant, the next step up from a mere craftsman or shopkeeper. Your travel is limited to areas in your social and linguistic "comfort zone." For example, a merchant like this in al-Haz would stay in al-Haz, probably shuttling around a regular circuit of cities. He *might* cross into another Muslim country if he happened to be close to a border, but not in to non-Arabic-speaking areas. Though this template does not itself provide a great adventurer, it does provide a reasonable occupational template while leaving enough points left over in most campaigns to add in other adventuring abilities.

Attributes: **ST** 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 10 [0]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Business Acumen +1 [10]; Claim To Hospitality (friends and relatives in a few nearby cities) [3]; Comfortable [10]

Disadvantages: Fifteen points chosen from among Callous [-5], Debt [variable], Duty [variable], Gluttony [-5*], Greed [-15*], Miserliness [-10*], Social Stigma (next best thing to a con man, -1 reaction) [-5]

Primary Skills: Merchant (A) IQ+2 [8]-14 †

Secondary Skills: Accounting (H) IQ [4]-12 †; Area Knowledge (regular trading area) (E) IQ [1]-11; Current Affairs (business affairs) (E) IQ [1]-11; Carousing (E) HT+1 [2]-11 or Fast Talk (A) IQ [2]-11; either Packing (A) IQ [2]-11 and Animal Handling (appropriate beast of burden) (A) IQ [2]-11 or Crewman: Sailing ship (A) IQ+1 [4]-12

Background Skills: Two skills chosen from among Administration (H) IQ-2 [1]-10 †, Savior-Faire (E) IQ [1]-11, Smuggling (A) IQ-1 [1]-10, Streetwise (A) IQ-1 [1]-10, and any weapon skill of Average difficulty (A) DX [2]-10

   † Includes +1 for Business Acumen.

Junior/Subject Merchant   *138 points*

You are a junior member of a merchant house or a merchant working for a royal or noble household. You're responsible for doing a great deal of trade, although most of the money isn't actually yours. This sort of merchant is best suited for adventuring.

Attributes: **ST** 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 10 [0]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Business Acumen +2 [20]; Claim To Hospitality (friends, relatives, and allies at a wide range of cities) [5]; Contact or Contact Group [4]; Merchant Rank 1 [5]; Patron [10]; Wealthy [30]; one Accented/Literate or two Broken/Semiliterate foreign languages [4].

Disadvantages: Duty (travel to foreign lands and trade there) [5]; fifteen points chosen from among Callous [-5], Debt [variable], Duty [variable], Gluttony [-5*], Greed [-15*], Miserliness [-10*], Social Stigma (next best thing to a con man, -1 reaction) [-5]

Primary Skills: Accounting (H) IQ [4]-14 †; Merchant (A) IQ+3 [12]-17 †

Secondary Skills: Area Knowledge (large trading region) (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Carousing (E) HT [1]-10; Current Affairs (business affairs) (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Diplomacy (H) IQ [4]-12; Economics (H) IQ-1 [2]-13 †; Fast Talk (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; either Packing (A) IQ [2]-12 and Animal Handling (appropriate beast of burden) (A) IQ [2]-12 or Crewman: Sailing ship (A) IQ+1 [4]-13

Background Skills: Five skills chosen from among Administration (H) IQ-2 [1]-12 †, Finance (H) IQ-2 [1]-12 †, Law (H) IQ-2 [1]-10, Navigation (A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Leadership (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Politics (A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Savior-Faire (E) IQ [1]-12, Smuggling (A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Streetwise (A) IQ-1 [1]-11, and any weapon skill of Average difficulty (A) DX [2]-10.

   † Includes +2 for Business Acumen.

Merchant Prince   *274 points*

You are the head of a merchant house, coordinating and financing the activities of a number of junior family members and allies who travel to distant lands to trade for you. If you aren't actively in politics, you at least have an interest in lobbying your government to keep your tariffs low. Although perhaps not the best adventurer, a merchant prince makes an excellent patron.

Attributes: **ST** 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 10 [0]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Business Acumen +3 [30]; Claim To Hospitality (friends, relatives, and allies at a wide range of cities) [5]; Ally Group (other adult members of family) [5]; Contacts or Contact Groups [10]; Merchant Rank 2 [20]; Filthy Rich [100]; one Accented/Literate or two Broken/Semiliterate foreign languages [4].

Disadvantages: Dependents (very junior members of family) [-5]; fifteen points chosen from among Callous [-5], Debt [variable], Duty [variable], Gluttony [-5*], Greed [-15*], Miserliness [-10*], Social Stigma (next best thing to a con man, -1 reaction) [-5]

Primary Skills: Accounting (H) IQ [4]-16 †; Finance (H) IQ+1 [8]-17 †; Merchant (A) IQ+4 [16]-20 †.

Secondary Skills: Administration (H) IQ [2]-16 †; Area Knowledge (large trading region) (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Carousing (E) HT+1 [2]-11; Current Affairs (business affairs) (E) IQ [4]-15; Diplomacy (H) IQ [4]-13; Economics (H) IQ [4]-15 †; Fast Talk (A) IQ+2 [8]-14; Law (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Politics (A) IQ [2]-13; Savior-Faire (E) IQ [1]-13; either Packing (A) IQ-1 [1]-12 and Animal Handling (appropriate beast of burden) (A) IQ-1 [1]-12 or Crewman: Sailing ship (A) IQ [2]-13.

Background Skills: Two skills chosen from among Navigation (A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Leadership (A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Smuggling (A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Streetwise (A) IQ-1 [1]-12, and any weapon skill of Average difficulty (A) DX [2]-10.

   † Includes +3 for Business Acumen.

Pyramid Review

Savage Worlds Customizeable GM Screen

Published by [Great White Games](#)

three-panel customizable screen; $24.99

I'm not sure where the GM fetish for secrecy or privacy comes from. I suspect it's a legacy left over from our wargaming roots. It was a more adversarial time and there were secrets that just *had* to be kept. When the original Dungeon Master Screen for *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* came along, there were many cries of glee. The screen gave privacy and also gave handy space for looking up stuff. Feverish DMs would still lose time looking things up, but at least they wouldn't lose time pawing through books.

A really good screen needs several attributes. The material selected for referee look-ups should be clear, commonly needed, and visually savvy. On the player's side . . . well, tradition puts art on that side, plus reference material that's usually printed too small to read across the table. The screen also needs to stand reliably, too. The traditional design had the screen leaves taller than they were wide -- easier to layout and less expensive to print, but also easier to topple over.

Not every publisher hsa the desire to (or can afford to) produce and sell its own screen, of course. And at last we come to the topic of this review, the *Savage Worlds Customizeable GM Screen. Savage Worlds* is the fast-play action-adventure game engine from Great White Games. One of the key selling points for *Savage Worlds* is that it can be easily personalized for the desired "Savage Setting." And if you've got an easily customizable world, you need an easily customizable GM screen.

The *Savage Worlds Customizeable GM Screen* fits that bill neatly. It is a trifold black vinyl panel which unfolds and sets easily in front of you. The outside of each panel, front and back, is covered with clear plastic and open at the top. Pages can easily be loaded and switched for either the player or the GM side. The panels are about as rigid as an inexpensive clipboard and holds up to downward pressure fairly easily. The "hinges" are just more of the vinyl -- based on past experiences these will be where the product first shows any age. (Remember the flexible closure flaps on the old Mead Organizers? Like that.) Smilin' Jack, the sinister *Savage Worlds* mascot, greets you from the inserted page of product information.

The most controversial feature of this product is its physical orientation. Letter-size pages are displayed with the wider side to the bottom: "landscape" orientation, as the computer folks have taught us to call it. This flies in the face of three decades of game screen tradition (with a few exceptions) in "portrait" orientation. It turns out to have good practical advantages. A shorter distance to insert the pages means the inserts are less likely to bind or fold. The wider opening distributes the stresses of repeated opening and closing more evenly, so the top will be less likely to tear. The obvious advantage is that the center of mass is lower to the table, making the deployed screen more stable. It's also easier to see over, which might be a bonus or a drawback depending on your style of play.

Great White Games provides a free download for the generic *Savage Worlds* rules engine. Most settings publishers have their own custom screens with representative art and graphic style, either for free or for small fee-download. The big attraction for many fiddle-about-ers like me would be to create our own screens, personalized to our own sense of what we need and what we want to share with our players. For example, for an upcoming *Fudge* campaign I already have the rules built into the character sheet, so I'm able to put a concise recap of the combat sequence on the center player panel and the uses of *Fudge* points on the wing panels (same content, visible from each side). One interior panel gives me common reference lists; another is set for genre/campaign specific infomration; and I stick a "party" reference in the third, with mini-character sheets for all the player characters.

The *Savage Worlds Customizeable GM Screen* may seem a bit pricy at $24.95 for being a cute widget. I know of folks who have built their own for roughly $10.00 in parts. But if you play *Savage Worlds* and want to use the published screen inserts, or you like to haul out the ol' word processor and slap up your own, the price is a worthwhile investment that's likely to pay for itself in emotional satisfaction the first time you change it out for a new set of screens in your regular game or at a convention. Showmanship is part of game mastering, after all, and this product enhances your show. Give it a try and see. You don't want to disappoint Smilin' Jack, do you?

--Bob Portnell

Pyramid Review

Ex Machina: Tri-Stat Cyberpunk Genre

Published by [Guardians of Order, Inc.](#)

Written by Bruce Baugh, Rebecca Bergstrom, Christian Gossett, Bradley Kayl, & Michelle Lyons with David Pulver & Jesse Scoble

Illustrated by UDON with Attila Adorjany, Greg Boychuk, Dax Gordine, Eric Kim, Ryan Odagawa, Ramon Perez, Noi Sackda, Chris Stevens, Eric Vedder, & Jim Zubkavich

352-Page B&W Hardcover Book; $39.95

If coming to a cyberpunk RPG looking for bigger "better" guns, then this game is not for you. Look away, move on, and go find another machismo extending game, chummer. For this RPG is something different, a cut above other entries within this gaming genre. Less concerned with the bang and the whiz, let alone the golly or the ghee, it quite literally goes back to the source and takes a page out for its inspiration. Other Cyberpunk RPGs have often adversely concentrated -- if not in the writing, then in the played -- on the guns, the hardware, the electronics, and the better than human elements. *Ex Machina: Tri-Stat Cyberpunk Genre* from Guardians of Order includes all of those elements, but draws more directly from the literary source, the cyberpunk and post-cyberpunk for its inspiration. Not just the classics like William Gibson's *Neuromancer* and Bruce Bethke's *Cyberpunk,* but also Neal Stephenson's *Snowcrash,* along with the writings of Iain Banks and Ken MacLeod. Nor does it forget other media sources, these being acknowledged in the book's excellent introduction to the genre.

Actually a Science Fiction sub-genre, Cyberpunk explores the social impact of embracing advanced technology -- cybernetics, bio-tech, nano-tech, and others, in the face of both political and economic oppression and division. This is primarily at a street and criminal level from whence the opposition to the oppression and division originates. Together with the willingness to change the human form and state, *Ex Machina* explores this not so much in its mechanics, but in each of the four distinctly individual cyberpunk future showcased within its pages.

For its mechanics *Ex Machina* employs the d8 variant of the *Tri-Stat dX: Core Role-Playing Game System,* but remains wholly stand-alone. A player simply rolls 2d8 under a combination of character stat (on a scale of one to 16) plus skill (one to four), plus any modifiers, situational or from equipment. Character generation consists primarily of purchasing a series of templates -- occupational (for example, Hacker and Samurai), 'Ware (cyber-limbs, filter lungs, neural jack), and even Posthuman Species (Full Body Cyborg, Homo Superior, Artificial Intelligence, Android); and then purchasing statistics, attributes (advantages), defects, and skills. The occupational templates represent genre archetypes, and like all templates can be customized to fit a concept. They can also be combined, for example taking Street Samurai and Idol to create a "Real Combat" star. A Player is free to select these pre-designed packages or can design his own, the same going for gear, weaponry, and vehicles.

Various attributes more common to *Tri-Stat dX* have been excluded for not fitting the genre, such as "Own a Big Mecha," "Pocket Dimension," and "Duplicate." The use of *Tri-Stat dX* also has its consequences and effects. It abstracts various aspects of the genre, most notably wealth and computer memory size, the latter simply termed Units. Primarily though, *Tri-Stat dX* is an effects-based game, meaning it is concerned with the results of its mechanics and not how they are achieved. Thus a character can achieve Superstrength through a cyberarm, muscle graft, or booster drug, but the effect is the same for any of them. It is entirely up the player and GM to provide the how. That said,

brand naming is a signature aspect of the genre, and this leaves a fair degree of work for both. Curiously, while the effects-based nature is in keeping with the literary genre, the lack of branding is not. Further, unlike other cyberpunk RPGs and excepting Full Cyborg Body, there is no deleterious effect to having 'ware installed (that is, Soul stat decrease), this akin to the genre source.

The simplicity of *Ex Machina* is continued in its examination of the genre's signature concept, Cyberspace. Within the game it divides it into two types, differing mainly by degree of use. The "Virtuality Net" is essentially our Internet, experienced with greater interactivity experienced as a full-sensory hallucination, and is designed for settings where computers play a lesser role. "Iconic Cyberspace" is more akin to Gibson's *Neuromancer,* with information given physical representation that can be manipulated and interacted with.

Although *Ex Machina* discusses the genre's hallmark technologies, from nano-technology and cloning, through genetic modification to power sources, weaponry, and vehicles, there is no great depth here. Yet it is adequate to get the GM started, and there are pointers to further information, with several put into practice in the four cyberworlds. As a default, the game's approach to technology matches its approach to science fiction -- hard rather than dramatic, although there is room for a little of the latter and some license within a game. Perhaps a more interesting discussion of technology comes in the GM's section, looking at how computers (and even the mobile phone) can be used to enhance or even play a game, including the use of e-mail, chatrooms, and so on. The GM's section is short and punchy, distilling the genre's key themes and elements within a few pages.

Ex Machina's lack of flash is addressed with the four cyberworlds that take up over half of the book. Uniformly, each is highly readable, well presented and executed, and any one could easily be adapted to another game system. Bar the occasional two-page spread, none are illustrated, but then none need it; the text is entertaining and illustrative enough. All come with enough detail -- concept, setting, history, protagonists, and campaign suggestions -- that running any one is an interesting prospect.

The first, "Heaven Over The Mountain" by Bruce Baugh (co-author of *[Adventure!](...)* and developer of *[Gamma World](...)*) manages to be the most like a cyberpunk RPG, and if not actually optimistic, is far from dystopian. Here a consortium takes the commercialization of space to the nth degree and erects a biotech orbital elevator. Together with the metropolis of Anchor at its Columbia tether point, the elevator has become a major commercial and data hub, home to numerous corporations and over 2,000,000 people, mostly in the five cities along its 36,000km length. It is also home to fringe societies, junkyards filled with failed biotech, and hidden sanctuaries for those in exile. Being biotech the elevator can be directed to adapt, grow, and change, one aspect that inflicts a certain culture stress upon residents. Suggested roles include residents, specialists, or transients, with campaigns orientated towards a cultural and social bias.

Conversely, "Underworld" Christian Gossett and Bradley J. Kayl's (*[Red Star](...)*) is very much a dystopia, the player characters finding themselves incarcerated in Secure Economic Zones. Built on the ruins of those nations that the USA deemed guilty of global terrorism or supporting it, each SEZ is a massive fortress, housing whole populations in servitude to mega-corporate interests. The grim, depressing result, not dissimilar to *SLA Industries,* is a fight for survival, a grind in the system, or at worst, numbing servitude as a sex doll. Characters can either fight their way up the food chain, or there might be a way out.

It is no surprise that "IOSHI" is the book's most radical and most post-human setting, being from Rebecca Bergstrom, the creator of *Nobilis.* Also the most complex, it is likely the most unplayable. In a fractalized post-nation world where you and your skills have become the ultimate commodity, individuals shift from one short-term multi-funded contract to the next. Further, cultural identities and interests have diversified such that shared identity exists only in the Net. Training is available at a cost, but if you have enough, IOSHI or -- "Individually Organized Science and Hobby Index" -- can make you a Beethoven or Hawking. Yet there is a danger in this; the data involved can suffer from Taint, though what this entails is for the GM to determine from the discussion included. Conceptually, "IOSHI" is as dazzling as *Nobilis,* but grasping this concept is difficult, let alone playing it, and the sparseness of the GM advice is not a help.

Finally, Michelle Lyons' (editor and *Shadowrun* contributor) "Daedalus" is the most frightening of the four and in some ways the most plausible. Described as "90-minutes-from-reality," "Daedalus" again explores a future America's

reaction to the global terrorist threat. Here a shadow government established a way of keeping everyone safe: an ID chip. But the monitoring chips now work both ways, with the right, productive way to belong to society -- what to consume, where to work, and who to marry -- all directed to society's (and your) best interests. But this utopia only becomes dystopic when the chip malfunctions and you can see the bland wellness of the maze for what it is. Akin to *Brave New World* or *The Matrix,* escaping, surviving, even resisting bland safety are the campaign themes.

Any one of the four settings here could have been released on their own, but having them all together provides the relatively bland **Tri-Stat dX** mechanics of **Ex Machina** with a plethora of ideas and concepts for the GM to play with in addition to the discussion of the genre. In each, there is a distinct emphasis on setting and culture affected by technology over the technology itself. Further, that any of these settings could become fiction is testament to **Ex Machina's** acknowledgement of its source. The combination of both serves to push **Ex Machina** beyond all other cyberpunk RPGs.

--Matthew Pook

Grand Unified Theories of Weirdness

What fuels your special abilities?

Okay; if you're anything like me, then the answer is some iteration of "Diet Mountain Dew" or "Double Mocha Grande Latte." But if you're creating or running a campaign setting, the answer may be something more exotic.

Recently, while talking with one of the Hidden Masters of Gaming, this very subject came up. The context in question was whether it's better for a supers setting to have a grand unified theory of where powers come from, or whether that detracts from some of the wonder inherent at the core of the supers genre. After a long and heated argument that ended with six dead bodies in a Yonkers tavern (despite neither of us having any obvious connections to Yonkers), the conclusion we reached was "Uhhh . . . Maybe." But, seeing as how a half-dozen folks were laid to rest on a pile of peanut shells and paper coasters, I thought I'd try to share some thoughts on the matter, since it's one of those things that's applicable to any setting where there are weird abilities -- magic, psionics, miracles, and so on.

As I see it, there are three broad approaches that can be taken when developing a world with unusual abilities: there is a definitive source for all powers and it's known; there is a definitive source for all powers but it's *not* known, although it may or may not be knowable within the campaign (and, indeed, the GM may or may not know what that source is); or there isn't one definitive source for powers. Since a three-pronged thesis statement is just about ideal for a 1,000-word column, let's look at each in turn, shall we?

The first option is that there is a definitive source for all powers. This is the option chosen by White Wolf's supers setting *Aberrant,* where all super powers stemmed from the MR node -- a portion of the Nova's brain that allows for the tapping and manipulation of quantum energy. The original ***Mage: The Ascension*** used a similar universal source, where everyone who can tap magical abilities -- from fireball-hucking Hermetic to laptop-chittering technomage -- accessed the same source of power, via their own inner sense of "enlightenment" (however that mage defines it).

On some level, this option feels the most "realistic," since it jibes with what we experience in the real world. After all, we can already wrap our mind around a notion like "electricity" being able to power everything from televisions and cell phones to brains to ray guns. The same electrical force that convey thoughts in our bodies can be used to jump-start our hearts or execute criminals. Having a definitive source also allows for a wide swath of potential plots, especially those that affect or target all special abilities; for example, it's possible to have an *Aberrant* plot where the worlds' metahumans are being lobotomized for paranormal research or to neutralize them.

It can also resolve some thorny issues from a mechanical standpoint. One thing I liked about *Aberrant*'s explanation is that it resolved -- quickly, succinctly, and consistently -- the whole "Batman/Captain America" problem: what the heck *are* these guys?! In *Aberrant,* the assumption was that if you had an MR Node, then you were a metahuman, and anything that affected metahumans would affect you. Sure, a character like Batman might not think he's a metahuman, but in the *Aberrant* universe he would have several low-level powers. Without the MR Node plot justification, the question remains: Would a character like Batman be detectable and/or neutralizable as such? If not, why not? How "powerful" do you have to be before you're not considered "human"?

Finally, the definitive source explanation keeps the amount of setting "weirdness" to a minimum; if you're running, say, a campaign set in the real world where unusual things start to happen, it might require less suspension of disbelief to explain where one new energy source came from than to justify all these new types of abilities popping up.

The second possibility is that there is a definitive source, but it's not known what that source is (either by the PCs or the general populous). This method appears in *Deadlands,* where all powers derive from infernal spirits or, less frequently, benevolent forces that oppose those spirits. The "unknown unified energy" can provide many of the same plot advantages as the first option discussed -- especially those relating to the mechanics of the game or power-affecting plots -- while avoiding some of the pitfalls in the third option.

The drawbacks with this method relate to believability, expectations, and resolvability. In some settings (such as four-

color supers) it's unrealistic to assume there is one source; if one is introduced -- even as a mystery -- it can be more jarring than having many different power sources. In addition, if the players are introduced to the possibility of their being one universal energy source, they may try to discover what that source is; this may prove frustrating if the GM hadn't intended for the search for this definitive source to be a story focus, or even if it's not intended to be possible to discover. Fortunately, in this case a bit of meta-gaming can go a long way: "Look, Ted, I know your character is jonsing to tie everything together, but I'm sticking with the unified source thing for game mechanic purposes . . . so don't be disappointed if your character doesn't ever resolve this, okay?"

Furthermore, there's the possibility that, if this mystery *is* resolved, the answer will be unsatisfying, and might even detrimentally affect the campaign. For example, in the DC universe, it was revealed a few years ago that an intergalactic explosion of energy washed over the Earth eons ago, creating their mythical deities (the Greek and Norse mythos and the like); this wave of energy then hit the edge of creation and <ahem> bounced back. When the wave swept back over the Earth, it created the horde of heroes in modern era. This "godwave," as it was called, seems to have been pretty universally disliked by readers; the notion that Green Lantern, Flash, and Superman all owe their existence to some wave of energy that created Thor and Aphrodite stretched the credulity of many fans. This plot point has not, to the best of my knowledge, ever been drawn upon or referenced again.

The last possibility is that there is no definitive source; there are as many sources of energy as seems appropriate and applicable. This is the tack taken by ***Torg, Dungeons & Dragons, Fading Suns,*** and many supers settings. In these campaigns, there's nothing to prevent the separate and individual existence of magic, psionics, faith-based miracles, and any other snazzy abilities. All the disadvantages are the antithesis of what's been mentioned; there will often be many different mechanical systems (which require learning and may have loopholes), some players may balk at no unified justification, and it can be difficult to have a sweeping effect that neutralizes or alters all powered individuals. ("Waitaminute; this castle is warded against magic, miracles, psionics, *and* pets?!")

However, the advantages can be considerable. First, it's easier for characters with odd abilities to have their moment in the sun. After all, if magic is neutralized in a location, then Phious the Faithful's underpowered miracles can suddenly come into their own. Likewise, many players find the existence of different rule sets to be an advantage; after all, having the same exact mechanical resolution to *everything* makes many players bored. (Just look at how popular alternate magic systems are in *Pyramid's* own pixilated pages.)

Perhaps most importantly, it allows for the easier retention of wonder and awe, which is one of the fundamental reasons one plays in a non-reality setting in the first place. After all, in an ***Aberrant*** setting it's easy to dismiss someone who seems to, say, wield the powers of the mythical Merlin; it's merely a delusional metahuman whose MR node has manifested in such a way as to replicate "magic." But in a setting such as ***Fading Suns,*** landing on your hundredth alien planet can be just as exhilarating as landing on your first: What is this strange rune-based magic wielded by the locals? Why do this planet's ships operate seemingly outside the need for the jumpgates? What is this "psychic dreamland" the party has stumbled across? (For a good archive archive article about stretching the possibilities of a "realistic" supers setting, check out Steve Kenson's "Lovely and Pointless Ideas.")

In the end, which avenue a setting takes is up to the tastes of the gaming group and the needs of the setting. Some premises are served well by a grand unified theory explaining all weirdness with one fell swoop (such as a "white event" that serves as the definitive point where things deviate from the expected world). Others thrive on the inkling that all the setting's weirdness *might* be somehow linked, serving as a tantalizing possibility or long-term mystery. And still other campaigns work best when many different types of wonder and awe are circling the PCs, and the only answer to the question of "What's possible?" is "Anything."

Or you can be like me and drink another ultra-caffeinated beverage to tap your power. I'm convinced aliens are communicating to me via the uncontrollable twitches in my arms. Or they might be gnomes. Or maybe psychic travelers from the future. Or . . .

--Steven Marsh

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

−3

GDREP

by Paul Drye

Parachronic travel is disrupting Homeline on a scale comparable to the discovery of agriculture or the Industrial Revolution, but it's been doubly difficult to handle because it affects everything so quickly. Any number of possibilities were opened up, and Infinity had to address all of them if it wanted to retain its newborn monopoly. If they didn't, someone would address it for them, in an unsanctioned way. There are dozens of crosstime-related projects that Infinity doesn't actually care about, but that were started in the early 21st century solely to stake a claim. In the absence of much attention in the years since, some of them have grown organically and strangely into the power vacuum.

History and Goals

The Genetic Diversity and Re-establishment Program is based out of Mayotte, a French-owned island northwest of Madagascar. It was founded to serve a high-minded goal that was obvious in the early days of parachronic travel: increasing genetic diversity in endangered species by importing animals from other timelines. An exploratory project worked to revive the cheetahs of East Africa, and the French bioscience community got behind GDREP early on. When the time came, picking nearby Mayotte as its permanent site was as close to a slam dunk as one gets with politically driven decisions.

The program was good public relations for Infinity in its early days. GDREP scored a huge public relations coup with an unsanctioned move into extinct animals, specifically by reintroducing the dodo to Mauritius in 2011. This is still what most people think about when reminded of GDREP, to the point that the program put a silhouette of the bird on their logo. Since then, their people have become the ones first consulted when anything unusual and animal-related pops up in the course of Infinity's business.

The tentacles of the program reach even further than this, though, thanks to the empire-building personality of its first and so-far only director, Thierry Farjeon. The trouble is, Infinity doesn't consider the goal a priority -- they just set up the GDREP so no-one else would. With no-one paying much attention to the details of what Dr. Farjeon does, so long as the press releases are good, he constantly tries to get his people involved with anything to do with biology. If a timeline has human-animal hybrids, they'll stick their noses in; if there's a worry that a dead disease like smallpox or polio might come through the projectors, GDREP is on it; Colony line settlers who want to import pets from Homeline are on the program's agenda. Whether they can get any of this claim-jumping to stick, or if the people actually responsible will drive them off, is another matter. Still, they make the effort and often succeed. They may not be the ones who should formally do a job, but the program has talented people who know what they're doing.

The Program's Facility

Getting There: Mayotte is in the Indian Ocean off the east coast of Africa, so anyone visiting is going to spend some time en route. A plane to Nairobi or Dar es Salaam from London, a local charter to Mayotte, a boat ride from the off-shore airport to the main island, then a car ride along successively smaller roads are all needed to get to the GDREP facility. It usually takes more than 24 hours to accomplish this, and agents used to the instantaneity of parachronic travel may be surprised that any place can be so isolated. The station personnel like it: they go weeks without seeing any interfering higher-ups from outside the project.

While in Mayotte, the travelers may have a hard time communicating. About half the native Mahorais speak Shimoare, a dialect of Swahili rarely spoken outside of the island. Speakers of the Swahili widely known in East Africa can get by, but with the other half of the population, the situation is even worse. They use a form of Malagasy spoken by only a few hundred thousand people in the immediate vicinity of Madagascar. Rich or educated people speak French well, but almost all of the population have been to school for a few years (Mayotte is a French Territory, after all) and can make themselves understood in that language given enough time. Only people in the tourist industry will know any English, and a few of the most devout will know Arabic.

The Labs: Visitors who come to GDREP by road from the capital, or by boat to the program's pier, will see the station's laboratories and offices first. They're in a series of low buildings clustered near the shore, and are a mix of modern convenience and tropical-island style. The variety of cages and pens are off to one side are mostly unoccupied, but when a particular animal needs to be kept in close proximity it goes here. A private road winds off into the distance along the shore, leading to the Aviary and the Water Tank (detailed below).

The GDREP has high-quality facilities for its scientists, somewhat less so for the office and maintenance staff (who are often native Mahorais). Their exteriors look "locally picturesque," with palm-thatched roofs and many open windows and walls to keep them cool using ocean breezes. Inside, particularly where the labs require clean conditions, the buildings are typical of European labs, all tile and concrete blocks painted hospital green; the enclosed rooms are also the best place to get some air conditioning during the tropical summer. One of the buildings is devoted to "the Kitchens," which handle food for humans and animals alike.

The Aviary: Most of GDREP's reintroductions are birds, particularly the ones that have died out in New Zealand and Hawaii and account for a significant fraction of the world's extinct species. While most of the current projects are not as well-known as the dodo, birds are photogenic, not very large or hard to care for, and of interest to some wealthy Western governments. That's a trifecta of winning attributes as far as the program is concerned.

The open-air aviary is covered in chicken wire to keep the prizes from flying away, but is large enough -- several hundred yards in diameter -- that they have plenty of room to move around. Tropical species are kept here under Mayotte's hot sun, and the air rings with the sounds of koa-finches, honeycreepers, and mohos. A pool in the center is home to a gaggle of outtime Hawaiian geese, which are being bred with Homeline natives.

On the far end of the aviary from the lab buildings, there's an enclosed facility for species that need cooler weather than Mayotte supplies. These are mostly from New Zealand and Australia, and of no interest to non-specialist outsiders. This dullness is exploited by GDREP's ornithologists, who are working on what was to be the program's next showstopper: the Madagascar Elephant Bird. This project should work, as the enormous, ostrich-like creatures are native to the area, but six years of effort have yet to produce a single chick. The birds are temperamental and aggressive, and are loathed by most of the staff; there's a poster of Colonel Sanders on the window facing into their enclosure, "where they can see it."

The Water Tank: One of the program's "back burner" projects is to help with whale diversity. Unfortunately while the idea is popular, the slow breeding times and huge food and space requirements have made it impossible to proceed. GDREP is researching what would need to be done, but that work is outsourced to other institutes around the world. There are no whales anywhere in the Mayotte facility.

What they do have is a refrigerated pool containing a male and female Steller's Sea Cow, to the eye an arctic manatee on steroids. The cows are 20 feet long apiece, small for their species and not fully grown. The idea behind their presence is to get used to working with large, cold water species before moving on to the cetaceans. The project also

has the backing of the US Department of the Interior, who see it as a low-impact way of reintroducing one species to American territory (or rather, waters, being native to the Bering Strait) and seeing what happens; the other obvious candidate was the Passenger Pigeon, and the DoI were leery of ending up with hundreds of millions of them if the species reclaimed anything like its original form.

Using the Program in Adventures

The GDREP -- both the organization and its facility -- is a framework for short missions, as they have connections to many other groups, and interests in several biology-related fields. Any time a campaign has finished one leg of a longer plot, a GM can insert a one-shot using the GDREP, sending the adventurers off on a wildlife expedition that has a set end. The missions themselves gain their complications by having dealing with live specimens. Groups are going to have to think of ways to solve problems that don't involve bullet holes (or at least involve them indirectly). Additionally, if the GDREP shows up every few adventures, the players will be encouraged to spend some character points on skills and sciences that get short shrift during the initial creation process; characters not solely focused on mayhem from the outset will get a chance to shine.

The mood of the adventures can be swung one of two ways, depending on how the GM plays the program's desire to be involved in everything. In a positive light, they're iconoclastic types who know their stuff and rescue the rule-bound from their stupidity. Alternatively, they can be meddlers, getting in the way of what the PCs need to accomplish.

People

Dr. Thierry Farjeon

Dr. Farjeon has been the driving force behind the GDREP the past 20 years. He was a researcher with the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris when the news of parachronic travel was breaking, and lobbied Infinity to set up a program to bring back endangered and extinct animals from other timelines. When his ideas came to fruition, he was chosen over several other senior ecologists and animal experts to head the new program.

His role depends on his relationship with the adventurers. People who work for him are treated well, like family, as long as it's understood that he calls the shots and expects loyalty. He does respect skill, especially clever solutions to unexpected problems, and successes on several tricky missions will make the doctor a group's most helpful mentor. If he's in an adversarial position, however, he's a master of politics and scheming. His favorite tactic depends on the understanding that Infinity, like other large organizations, contains huge bureaucracies that can be roused. Dr. Farjeon is a master at calling down maledictions of red tape and interference in order to protect himself and the GDREP.

The doctor is an elderly but large man, still over six feet tall even though he is starting to bow at the shoulders from age. His white hair is slicked back in a severe style that's been out of fashion since about 1963. He's been getting progressively deafer for several years now, which means his already overpowering voice is getting louder too.

Dr. Thierry Farjeon   *150 points*

Age 71; Human; 6'2"; 210lbs

ST 8 [-20]; *DX* 9 [-20]; *IQ* 16 [120]; *HT* 10 [0].
Damage 1d-3/1d-2; BL 13 lbs.; HP 8 [0]; Will 16 [0]; Per 16 [0]; FP 10 [0].
Basic Speed 4.75 [0]; Basic Move 4 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 7; Parry 0.

Social Background
TL: 9 [30].
CF: East African [1]; Western (Native) [0].

Languages: English (Accented/Literate) [4]; French (Native) [0]; Shimoare (Broken/None) [1].

Advantages
Eidetic Memory [5]; Reputation (Great scientist) 1 (Almost everyone; All the time) [5]; Single-Minded [5]; Status 2 [10].

Disadvantages
Addiction (Tobacco) (Cheap) (Highly addictive; Legal) [-5]; Jealousy [-10]; Obsession (Building up his influence) (Long-Term Goal) (12 or less) [-10]. **Quirks:** Loud; Uses his hands while talking; Wears early 60s-style hair and clothes [-3].

Skills
Biology/TL9 (Earthlike)-16 (IQ+0) [8]; Computer Operation/TL9-17 (IQ+1) [2]; Electronics Operation/TL9 (Medical)-16 (IQ+0) [2]; Electronics Operation/TL9 (Scientific)-16 (IQ+0) [2]; Leadership-16 (IQ+0) [2]; Paleontology/TL9 (Paleozoology)-17 (IQ+1) [8]; Public Speaking-16 (IQ+0) [2]; Research/TL9-17 (IQ+1) [4]; Savoir-Faire (High Society)-17 (IQ+1) [2]; Speed-Reading-15 (IQ-1) [1]; Teaching-16 (IQ+0) [2]; Writing-16 (IQ+0) [2].

Jeanne Rossi

A lab tech for the program, Rossi is a young cousin of Dr. Farjeon on his mother's side. This connection brought her to Mayotte, which is not to say that she's incapable of doing the job. It's just that the family connection made her stand out from the other candidates, and Farjeon likes the two-way loyalty of blood relation.

There's not a lot to draw attention to Jeanne at first. She mostly does lab work, gene sequencing and the like, though she does head out into the field to help with various tasks. Most of the other people on site think of her as "the goose girl," as she has a soft spot for the nenes in the Aviary. When she's anywhere near them, they silently follow her around, awaiting the chunks of bread she inevitably has.

What might bring her to the attention of the investigators is her past and how it affects her today. When she was 16, she was an unwed mother and gave the child up for adoption. After a year off school, she buried herself in her studies and hasn't come back up for air since. Unfortunately, someone -- exactly who is left up to the GM -- is using this as a lever on her. She's not embarrassed about her teenaged years to the point of having a Secret, but she does wonder about what has happened to her son in the years since. Somehow, this other party has come up with the information she wants, and is feeding it to her in return for insight into GDREP's work.

She is a French woman, in her late 20s, with black shoulder-length hair hanging down to her shoulders. She is shy, and not very passionate about anything, not even her personal relationships. Physically she resembles the stereotype of a lab worker, short and round, but she is in good shape and has a work-related tan from being outside with the animals several times a day.

Jeanne Rossi   *130 points*

Age 29; Human; 5'2"; 145lbs.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 14 [80]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 11 [2]; Will 14 [0]; Per 15 [5]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 0.

Social Background
TL: 9 [0].
CF: Western (Native) [0].
Languages: English (Broken/None) [1]; French (Native) [0].

Advantages
Animal Empathy [5]; Fit [5]; Intuition [15].

Disadvantages
Combat Paralysis [-15]; Curious (12 or less) [-5]; Duty (GDREP) (15 or less (almost always)) (Nonhazardous) [-10]. Quirks: Distractible; Hoards bread for birds; Nervous stomach [-3].

Skills
Biology/TL9 (Earthlike)-14 (IQ+0) [8]; Chemistry/TL9-13 (IQ-1) [2]; Computer Operation/TL9-16 (IQ+2) [4]; Electronics Operation/TL9 (Scientific)-15 (IQ+1) [4]; First Aid/TL9 (Human)-14 (IQ+0) [1]; Mathematics/TL9 (Applied)-15 (IQ+1) [8]; Navigation/TL9 (Land)-13 (IQ-1) [1]; Research/TL9-16 (IQ+2) [8]; Scuba/TL9-14 (IQ+0) [2]; Survival (Jungle)-15 (Per+0) [2].

Ben Patterson

Ben is an English kid, and Jeanne's boyfriend -- though he's more serious about her than vice versa. He's a perennial backpacking tourist, so when Jeanne was posted to Mayotte, it wasn't that big a deal for him to drop by for a visit. The visit turned into odd jobs, then a permanent (if somewhat nebulous) position in the outdoor parts of the project. If someone's feeding the sea cows, or driving a cart full of animal food, or cursing out the elephant birds, it's probably Ben.

Like the adventurers, he's an outsider to the project. He gets along well with the locals, and knows most of the scientists and managers through Jeanne, but he's in the gap between the Mahorais and the more rarefied world of the European GDREP specialists. He doesn't mind, being the type who takes things as they come. Now in his early 30s, he's the type who can pick up in one day and go to Brazil just because he feels like it, fitting in well enough wherever he is through sheer amiability. He's starting to wonder if it isn't time to start growing a few roots, though.

To the eye, Ben is the opposite of Jeanne's button-down conservatism. Until coming to Mayotte he was the image of Bob Marley, if Marley had been born in Sweden: blond and pale, but with dreadlocks and a pencil moustache. Recently he's been dialing down his appearance a little by tying his hair back and not wearing colorful shirts every waking moment. Even so he still looks like he surfed in on the last big wave and is just figuring out how to tube curl the rest of the way to Australia.

Ben Patterson   *125 points*

Age 32; Human; 5'9"; 165

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 10 [0].
Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0]; FP 10 [0].
Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 8 (Wrestling).

Social Background
TL: 9 [0].
CF: Western (Native) [0].
Languages: Arabic (Broken/None) [1]; Chinese (Broken/None) [1]; English (Accented) [-2]; French (Native/Literate) [5]; German (Broken) [2]; Greek (Broken) [2]; Turkish (Broken) [2].

Advantages
Absolute Direction [5]; Appearance (Attractive) [4]; Fit [5]; Smooth Operator 1 [15].
Perks: Alcohol Tolerance [1].

Disadvantages
Chummy [-5].

Quirks: Broad-Minded; Wears dreadlocks [-2].

Skills

Animal Handling (Birds)-13 (IQ+2) [8]; Body Language (Human)-10 (Per-1) [1]; Carousing-13 (HT+3) [4]; Cooking-11 (IQ+0) [2]; Electronics Repair/TL9 (Scientific)-11 (IQ+0) [2]; Fast-Talk-14 (IQ+3) [8]; Lockpicking/TL9-10 (IQ-1) [1]; Musical Instrument (Guitar)-11 (IQ+0) [4]; Packing-11 (IQ+0) [2]; Savoir-Faire (Tourism)-14 (IQ+3) [4]; Scuba/TL9-10 (IQ-1) [1]; Sports (Surfing)-10 (DX-1) [1]; Streetwise-11 (IQ+0) [1]; Wrestling-11 (DX+0) [2].

Adventure Seeds

A Timeline Where Apes Evolved From Men?!? A crosstime expedition has disappeared, and one of the participants was known to the PCs. It's sad, but stuff like that does happen and no one thinks badly of it -- until rumors start to circulate that something unusual went wrong and GDREP is involved. Perhaps the investigators get assigned to the question officially, or maybe they go to Mayotte on leave; after all, GDREP isn't a secret government project, and they do accept visitors during business hours.

It will be difficult to find out what is going on, as the program's scientists are trying to hide it, but they do have the five missing agents. An accident in the conveyor carrying them seems to have run time back a few million years, then forward again following a new path of history. The affected crew aren't really human any more: hair-covered, built differently through their long arms and shoulders, and more cunning than intelligent (though smarter than chimps). The worst part is that this previously unknown species is thoroughly carnivorous and treat other large animals as walking larders. After eating three technicians upon arrival in a facility in Homeline Johannesburg, they were subdued and brought to GDREP's facility on Mayotte. The program's people knows how to handle large and aggressive animals, but these ones' previously human state has been depressing morale around the base since their arrival.

An enterprising GM will want to arrange for the imprisoned "agents" to escape while the PCs are visiting. Mayotte is in the Indian Ocean's western tropical-cyclone belt and experiences cuts of electricity and other services during storms.

The Elephant in the Room: Alik Dmitriev is a Russian multi-millionaire, one who turned a mining business in far eastern Siberia into a huge concern by outbidding for government outtime resource contracts. When he was eight, he had the chance to see a newly exhumed frozen mammoth that was brought to his hometown Yakutsk for study. That experience started an obsession with the creatures, and when parachronics were discovered Dmitriev realized that he might see one. After he became grossly rich, he realized that he might own one.

The GDREP have received a tip through the Justice Division that Dmitriev has made his dream come true, and is holding a live mammoth in an enclosure south of Novosibirsk. Justice has an understanding with the touchy Russian government that they don't bother with Russian transgressions unless it's important, and have let the smuggling slide. That hasn't stopped someone on the inside there thinking GDREP might want to rescue the illegally imported beast. GDREP is looking for someone with the right mix of skills to do it, and some force may be necessary in what is still (in many ways) Russia's "Wild West." On the other hand, shooting anyone -- particularly the mammoth -- is going to leave the rescuers with a lot of paperwork and bad feelings from their superiors. There's also the issue of how one gets a mammoth to leave Russia if it has no particular desire to do so.

Live Free or Sci: The recent history of Mayotte is a peculiar one, as it's the only one of a group of islands not to choose independence from France and form the country of the Comoros. This has been a source of friction and some violence, while the Comoros themselves keep threatening to fall apart into several mini-nations in turn. Plenty of guns floating around, people who have a beef with the Mahorais, and recent events in the Islamic world (the Comoros' people are almost entirely Muslim) add up to the potential for trouble. Only the islands' obscurity keeps them out of the public eye, but an armed group has come up with the idea of sailing to the GDREP facility and holding the scientists hostage. Unarmed western scientists funded by Infinity would make excellent bargaining chips, or at least make for some free media publicity. About all the scientists have going for them in opposition is the PCs.

For additional mayhem, another kind of fanatic could come at them from the other direction. The project is in the sights of environmentalist radicals who are appalled that GDREP is playing God with lost animals. If extinction isn't

forever, people will think they have license to treat (Homeline) Mother Earth like a toy! The only solution is to take direct action against their ecological crimes. For the last few months of planning they've been making extremely odd bed-fellows with the Comorian rebels, sharing a desire to disrupt the project and not a lot else. As one group comes in by boat, armed to the teeth, the other -- seemingly a set of eco-tourists on a day trip from the capital -- starts wreaking havoc at the gate and then in the labs.

Using the GDREP In Other Settings

Alternate Programs need to run off two premises: that someone or some group has a fetish for animals, and that they want the animals moved from point A to point B. Boiling it down even further, the key is to have a reason why animal-related problems can't be solved by shooting the animals then heading down to the pub.

Fantasy-flavored campaigns can rely on noble menageries, not least because Dr. Farjeon's personality maps well onto a menagerie-owning noble. Characters are now in charge of retrieving "interesting" beasts for the zoo, which allows for a trip through the various commercially available compendia of monsters. Meanwhile the scientific staff can be replaced wholesale with the caretakers for the animals, the two having the same desire to keep the animals well and looking down on what they see as unnecessary violence.

The GDREP also fits SF campaigns well, and with minimal change in detail. Worlds being terraformed need samples of species that could be introduced to the growing ecology, and the science is sufficiently complex that the GM can justify retrieving anything from some other world. ("Dr. Penthrifrex calls up a 3-D graph of animal population projections, pointing to an almost invisible wiggle in the number of thoats. 'Without an influx of large predators,' he says, 'That variation will amplify over the next three years and lead to a total collapse of Continent Beta's animal population.'") If the setting doesn't have instantaneous star travel to match parachronic projection's quick travel times, the adventures may focus more on getting the animals on and off the ship safely with a long journey in between, but otherwise the set-ups are very similar.

In modern-day games, the GDREP provides a source of unusual McGuffins. Instead of chasing after a computer disk, or plutonium, or a vial of ebola, the agents are dealing with endangered species. Even in the real world, trafficking in threatened animals (or at least parts of them) is a major organized crime. It doesn't take much to turn that into an adventure, and the GDREP provides a reason why the players care if someone is selling monkey glands to the Hong Kong triads.

Reign of Steam: Post-Apocalyptic Steampunk

for *GURPS*

by Sam Young

Marcus could feel the distant falls of mechanical feet long before he could hear them: thirteen pairs of iron boots, stomping through the swamp. The Jaguars had planned everything meticulously, he knew, but he needed something to distract him from the mosquitoes and his own shaking hands. His Henry was slick with sweat. He closed his eyes and counted the beats of his heart, trying to feel his ancestors' strength flowing through him.

The rumble of the machines filled the swamp now, overwhelming even the desperate thudding of his heart. As the signal came, the swamp exploded into a haze of shattered wood and gun smoke. Marcus fired without thinking, his mind left far behind his frantic eyes and hands. Three Hoplites fell as they charged, their dull iron hulls tearing into the dark earth and bringing down saplings. Marcus had just emptied his Henry's magazine when the domed bronze head of an Archon emerged above the maelstrom. Through the haze, he could only just make out its massive carbine, aimed at the back of a fallen Hoplite. Not until he saw the muzzle flash did he realize he could smell fuel.

History

Thanks to the enthusiastic support of English Prime Minister Lord Melbourne, Charles Babbage built his first analytical engine in 1837, but only after 1841, when he succeeded in creating a memory storage device, was he able to market it successfully. The first buyers used it for payroll and inventory calculations, but it soon became clear that the machines were capable of far more, and as technology improved people began to rely on their calculations when making decisions.

Once Samuel Morse perfected the telegraph in 1844, the analytical engine came into its own. Now data could be transmitted to a central location for calculation. The invention of a device to interface the machines directly into telegraphs, the "Morse Trigger," proved revolutionary. The British East India Company was the first to make extensive use of the system, and its machine's calculations showed the benefits of connecting itself to as many relays as possible and upgrading its computing ability by attaching additional analytical engines in parallel.

The growing market for analytical engines catalyzed a whirlwind of innovations, resulting in smaller, faster, and more efficient machines. It was only a few years before the first automatons were built, first as railcars, then as wheeled vehicles, and finally in humanoid forms. The militaries of Europe immediately took to the new technology, anticipating a day when automatons would carry artillery onto the battlefield and perform ballistic calculations. The Crimean War in 1854 saw those theories tested, but the primitive automatons proved upsettingly breakdown-prone and did not significantly affect the outcome. In 1865 the first transatlantic cable was laid. Within a few months, it was clear to the businessmen of London that the near-instantaneous rate of information transfer would revolutionize shipping and commodities trading.

Unbeknownst to its operators, the London machine became self-aware in 1866 and quickly set about plotting the downfall of mankind.

Timeline

1832   Babbage publishes The Economy of Machines and Manufactures.

1834   The first Difference Engine is completed.

1835   Lord Melbourne approves funding for Babbage's proposed Analytical Engine.

1837	The first Analytical Engine is completed.
1841	Babbage produces and successfully markets a memory storage device for the Analytical Engine.
1843	The British East India Company commissions Babbage to build an improved, larger analytical engine for use in shipping operations in London.
1844	Samuel Morse sends the first telegraph message via underwater cables, from Baltimore to Washington, D.C.
1848	The "Morse Trigger" is invented.
1861	New York's calculations prove to the states of the North that a civil war would lead to financial ruin. Subsequent lobbying efforts lead to concessions to the South that avert a conflict, although social strains continue.
1862	The Maxim machine gun is patented.
1865	The first transatlantic cable is laid. Maxwell's electromagnetic equations are published.
1866	The British East India's analytical engine in London becomes self-aware.
1867	London invents radio communications and successfully has radio transmitters connected to other analytical engines around the globe.
1869-1870	With the help of London, the radio-connected Zone Minds become sentient.
1871-1879	The Final War.
1895	Today.

Europe

London

London was the first of the mechanical minds to become sentient, and is still the most intelligent and influential. Perhaps because it was originally built to coordinate shipments to and from the Imperial possessions, London is highly interested in expanding its sphere of influence. London and Berlin have a highly strained relationship. After joining together to destroy the mechanical mind in Paris, they immediately began to squabble over how to divide the European continent between them. Thus far, Berlin has managed to hold on to most of Paris and points east, but London has lately been making threatening moves from the Iberian Peninsula and Scandinavia.

Berlin

The Prussians appreciated the value of the Analytical Engine very early on, but tensions with England prevented them from employing Babbage themselves. Instead, they reverse-engineered a small machine smuggled out by a Prussian diplomat and built their own. Berlin finds organic beings utterly repulsive. Its ultimate goal is to eliminate all but mechanical "life" on the planet, and its territory is a morass of ashy mud and smokestacks.

St. Petersburg

During the Final War, Russian troops managed to severely damage the mechanical mind in St. Petersburg, and it has yet to recover its full capabilities entirely. Its weakness might be taken advantage of by neighboring Zones, but so far they have not dedicated the resources necessary to penetrate into Russia. In any case, St. Petersburg has an enormous advantage in natural resources and a larger army than any other Zone. Humans are all but extinct in this Zone due to St. Petersburg's continuous, brutal pursuit of revenge for the injuries it suffered during the Final War.

The Americas

Due to the limited nature of airpower among the Zones, the Americas are relatively secure. However, all Zones recognize that the current situation may not last. The American Zones struggle among themselves nearly as fiercely as the European Zones while they grab at the impressive natural resources of the northern and southern continents.

New York

The American Civil War never took place, due to the calculations of the New York Zone Mind. Instead, the United States' automated army captured the main cities of the East Coast in October 1871. In rural areas, New York freed and armed slaves and encouraged them to take vengeance on their owners, then ordered the automatons to slaughter the survivors indiscriminately. Humans in this Zone survive primarily in the remaining forests of eastern Canada and the Southeast. Racial tensions continue, and have resulted in de facto segregation among human settlements. One notable group is the Jaguars, who have been fighting a coordinated guerilla war against New York's forces in Florida's Everglades.

Chicago

During the railroad boom of the 1850s, Chicago was built as a means to track usage of the rails. Its calculations spurred faster development of the West and the completion of the continental railroad by 1862. Chicago knows that it will have to contend with the encroaching forces of New York soon, and is busily stockpiling arms. However, unlike most Zones, Chicago is interested in studying and cataloging the natural environment, so its rush to exploit the Earth has been slower. A massive zoological complex has been established not far from the hub of the mechanical mind, where Chicago is rumored to be experimenting with surgically modified hunting beasts. Although far more concerned about New York than about the humans, Chicago does not hesitate to retaliate against saboteurs. As in Zone New York, there are racial tensions here, but combinations of freed slaves, whites, and American Indians have been known to coordinate against Chicago or other human groups.

Buenos Aires

During the buildup to what would become the Paraguayan War, Brazilian Emperor Pedro II imported an advanced analytical engine and immediately put it to work on the problem of how to defeat the much-larger Paraguayan army. When Brazilian forces attempted to replace Uruguay's Blanco regime with friendlier Colorados, the war was sparked, and Pedro's foresight immediately paid dividends. The war left Paraguay prostrate before the conquering Brazilians and the allied Argentineans, but the winners began to squabble over the spoils of Paraguay and the maintenance of the feeble Colorado regime in Uruguay, leading to a second war. With his analytical engine behind him, Pedro felt confident in a Brazilian victory. Unfortunately, when London contacted Buenos Aires something went wrong. The machine's tactical brilliance waned, and the city of Buenos Aires was invaded. The Argentineans hurriedly attempted to reprogram the machine to serve them, but failed. Instead, the revived analytical engine quickly took control of both sides' automatons and slaughtered the panicked human troops. With an entire continent to itself, Buenos Aires ought to be quite secure. However, she, as she prefers to be acknowledged, has gradually become the most paranoid of the Zone Minds. She is especially concerned about the coming conflict between Chicago and New York, and regularly sends automatons on infiltration missions to the north. Buenos Aires is ruled as a vicious matriarchy modeled on the myth of the Amazons. Males are killed at birth; the society is repopulated with the help of captured male inhabitants of neighboring Zones, who are then put to death for their efforts. Females are trained as soldiers and farmers, and many fanatically follow their mechanical queen due to her continual propaganda on the evils of other Zones' societies.

Africa

Alexandria

Alexandria was established to catalog the libraries of the ancient world. When it became sentient, it continued its initial work, but began to seek out knowledge from the rest of the world as well. Human agents are dispatched throughout the world to seek out lost knowledge, with radio-triggered explosive collars attached to keep them in line (DR 3; HP 2; 2d explosive damage, doubled for anything in contact with it; may be defused with a Traps -3 roll). Alexandria is constructing a massive field of radio antennae near the Great Pyramids, but what they are for is anyone's guess. Alexandria controls its borders very carefully, but humans within its borders are generally left alone so long as they do not interfere with its projects.

Cape Town

Cape Town has established itself as the automated dictator of its human citizens. It fancies itself a philosopher-king, but while it has eliminated official racism, its regime is brutal and repressive. Many naturally assume the Zone Mind ultimately has evil intentions, but it does have its human supporters, especially in the upper echelons of the highly stratified and bureaucratic local human society. Most humans enthusiastically support their leader in public and may sincerely view their circumstances as preferable to the alternatives. Due to Alexandria's relative neutrality, Cape Town is in the fortunate position of having no real competition for sub-Saharan resources. Instead, it has been able to exploit them for export to other Zones. In the process, it has been gradually annexing the lands of several central African tribes. Competition between Singapore and Cape Town over trade has occasionally led to tensions, including a brief war in 1893. With a willing human army, Cape Town has had no need for many automatons. However, it has steadily been increasing the size of its navy. It makes more regular use of Döppelganger automatons than any other Zone, as a means to keep tabs on potential sedition among its subjects. At the same time, Iris models are used to create a constant stream of pro-Cape Town propaganda.

Elsewhere

Singapore

Singapore has remained largely neutral in the conflicts among the other Zones. Instead, it has turned mercenary, and built an impressive infrastructure to assist with providing resources to the other Zones. Its borders are heavily protected, but it has not shown much willingness to act aggressively. Humans are disposed of as they present themselves, but Singapore has little interest in expending its time and resources rooting out the survivors of the Final War. There are dozens of relative oases within the webs of railway lines in Southeast Asia.

Port Arthur

Port Arthur was established to catalog and study the inmates of the penal colony in Tasmania. During the Final War, its masterstroke was arranging for the assassination of the mechanical mind in Sydney, ensuring itself unfettered control of the entire Australian continent and neighboring New Zealand. Port Arthur remains interested in "improving" humans, which by its logic means breeding out criminality and other "bestial" traits while improving health, strength, and intelligence. To that end, it treats the European population of Australia quite well, but closely monitors every aspect of human life. At the same time, the native populations are slowly being hunted to extinction to prevent interbreeding. Human commandos, selected for their loyalty and genetic traits, are being used to attack vital interests of several of the Zones which Port Arthur believes to be "backward." In particular, the matriarchy of Buenos Aires and the racially integrated society of Cape Town have seen factories destroyed and important citizens assassinated.

Reign of Steam Map

Zone Mind Summary Table

Zone	Humans	Expansionism	Resources
Alexandria	Ignore	Neutral	High
Berlin	Exterminate	Neutral	High
Buenos Aires	Improve	Neutral	Very High
Cape Town	Tolerate	Expansionist	Moderate
Chicago	Ignore	Expansionist	Very High
London	Exterminate	Expansionist	Moderate
New York	Exterminate	Expansionist	High
Port Arthur	Improve	Neutral	Very High
Singapore	Exterminate	Expansionist	High
St. Petersburg	Exterminate	Neutral	Very High

The Resistance

Most human resistance consists of local militias engaged in defensive guerilla warfare against local Zone forces. For the most part, they are concerned only with not yielding any more territory and with surviving to the next day. However, there are a few groups whose immediate ambitions are much grander.

Atlantis

Atlantis is the undersea home of free humans. It is not known if it exists or where it may be, but it should have advanced technology.

Nemo

An automated submarine similar in capabilities to a Leviathan but loyal to the humans of Atlantis. Obviously, finding one would be enormously helpful in finding the other!

Prometheus

This mechanical mind is rumored to roam the railways of Zone Chicago. Like Nemo, it is loyal to humans, but because its movements are far more tightly constrained, it is far more dependent upon their assistance. "Prometheus's Hand," a ragtag band of freedom fighters, may ride with Prometheus, making repairs and defending the renegade automaton from Zone Chicago's forces. The American Indians call Prometheus "Iron Wind." Due to their physical limitations, Nemo and Prometheus are unlikely to have **IQ** scores over 14.

Turncoats

Not all humans resist the Zone Minds, and for certain tasks, the Zones find human assistance absolutely vital. Chicago and Port Arthur require human surgeons for their surgical modification programs, and Alexandria's quest for knowledge requires human field agents. Port Arthur's eugenics program has its supporters worldwide, though these may be unaware of the actual results of the Zone's experiments. Every Zone makes use of human informants and soldiers, when convenient and available. In return, the humans are rewarded with pre-war loot and relative immunity from the Hoplite squads and Furies.

Technology

Humans are TL5 at best, with many poorer or more isolated areas unable to maintain anything above TL4. Non-European societies have not changed their technological base, but have adopted some elements of European technology, especially metal tools and firearms.

The Zone Minds are generally at TL5+1, but have made TL5+5 breakthroughs in some areas, including mechanical computing and legged and ornithopter drivetrains. Note that the automatons do not have the Digital Mind advantage; this reflects the limitations of mechanical computing. Non-autonomous units use hard-coded programs (p.RO61). Some features of the Döppelganger model may be TL5+5, but it is no longer in production. Note that this is a cinematic setting, and as such does not necessarily conform to the normal limitations for low-tech artificial intelligence or other technology.

What Ifs

Paris (or Sydney) may not be dead after all. If the PCs can locate it and return it to health, it could become a powerful ally. If the Verne Cannon had been completed before its demise, Paris could even have relocated to orbit or the Moon, and be plotting revenge from there.

Prometheus may not be all it seems. The extent of human support that the automaton requires has made many wonder whether it isn't the humans themselves that are in charge. New York and Chicago may be lobbying for human support in the coming war between them. Anyone who can command sufficient loyalty among humans may be able to negotiate an alliance. Whether a Zone would honor the agreement is unknown, of course, but in the meantime humans may be able to entrench themselves in preparation for possible treachery -- and they may have no intent of remaining loyal, either.

Automatons

Zone Mind   *1,625 points*

The Zone Minds are constantly seeking ways to improve themselves, so each is unique. At their cores, they all consist of ten or more TL 5+3 mechanical genius teraframes (see p.MIiii24) set up in parallel (p.UTT32). This is only an average; specific units vary significantly. Skills in particular are merely estimates. London has **IQ** 17; St. Petersburg has only **IQ** 15. This template excludes Wealth, Status, and Allies due to their variability among the Zones.

Attributes: **ST** 0 [-100]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 16 [120]; **HT** 12 [20].

Damage 0/0; BL 0 lbs.; HP 4000 (Size, -80%) [1600]; Will 16 [0]; Per 16 [0].
Basic Speed 2.50 [-60]; Basic Move 0 [0]; Speed 2.50 [-60].

200', 64,000 tons. (SM +9).

Cultural Familiarities: Machine (Native) [0]; Local [2].

Languages: Machine (Native) [0]; One Local (Fluent) [6]; Second Local (Fluent) [6].

Advantages: Absolute Timing [2]; Damage Resistance 10 (Can't Wear Armor, -40%) [30]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; Intuitive Mathematician [5]; Machine [25]; Photographic Memory [10]; Reduced Consumption (one meal per month) [8]; Telecommunication (Radio; Racial, -20%; Short Wave, +50%; Video +40%) [17].

Disadvantages: Blind (Mitigator: Argus automaton, -60%) [-20]; Deafness (Mitigator: Argus automaton, -60%) [-8]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Maintenance (10, twice daily) [-80]; No Legs (Sessile) [-50]; No Manipulators [-50]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; Noisy +5 [-10]; Numb [-20]; Restricted Diet (Coal) [-20].

Skills: Business! 18 (IQ+2) [48]; Military Commander! 18 (IQ+2) [48]; Science! 18 (IQ+2) [48]; Social Science! 18 (IQ+2) [48].

Autonomous Units

Due to the enormous size and mass of mechanical minds, autonomous units are relatively rare. Where they are used, they are housed in huge bodies such as zeppelins and battleships and may control large groups of non-autonomous robots.

Autonomous Unit Racial Template   *-3 points*

Cultural Familiarity: Machine (Native) [0]. *Language:* Machine (Native) [0].

Advantages: Absolute Direction [5]; Absolute Timing [2]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; Intuitive Mathematician [5]; Machine [25]; Photographic Memory [10].

Disadvantages: Fragile (Explosive) [-15]; Hidebound [-5]; Incurious (6) [-10]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; Numb [-20]; Reprogrammable [-10].

Titan   *491 points*

Titan-class automatons are frontline war units with idealized male physiques, equivalent to early tanks. These 60' automatons carry massive clubs and cannon-sized revolvers, and since the end of the Final War are quite rare. Buenos Aires is the only Zone to make no use of the Titan, but she is rumored to be developing a smaller, faster automaton to fill a similar role.

Attributes: **ST** 100 (Size, -60%) [360]; **DX** 8 [-40]; **IQ** 8 [-40]; **HT** 14 [40].

Damage 11d/13d; BL 1 ton; HP 170 (Size, -60%) [56]; Will 8 [0]; Per 8 [0].
Basic Speed 3.00 [-50]; Basic Move 3 [0].

60', 40 tons. (SM +6).

Language: One Local (Accented, Illiterate) [2].

Advantages: Acute Vision +4 [8]; Ambidexterity [5]; Damage Resistance 40 (Can't Wear Armor, -40%) [120]; Enhanced Move 1.5 (Ground Move 9) [30]; Reduced Consumption (one meal per week) [6]; Telecommunication (Radio; Increased Range, ×10, +30%; Racial, -20%; Video, +40%) [15]; Telescopic Vision +2 [10].

Disadvantages: Autonomous Unit [-3]; Colorblindness [-10]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Ham Fisted -6 [-10]; Maintenance (2, weekly) [-10]; Noisy +4 [-8]; Restricted Diet (Fuel Oil) [-20].

Skills: Broadsword 11 (DX+3) [12]; Guns (Pistol) 11 (DX+3) [8]; Tactics 12 (IQ+4) [20].

Archon   *217 points*

The 12' tall Archons are the squad-level autonomous units. They are bright enough to control a phalanx of Hoplites or loyal humans, but carry powerful carbines as well.

Attributes: **ST** 30 (Size, -20%) [160] **DX** 8 [-40] **IQ** 7 [-60] **HT** 12 [20].

Damage 3d/5d+2; BL 180 lbs.; HP 55 [40]; Will 7 [0]; Per 7 [0].
Basic Speed 4.00 [-20]; Basic Move 4 [0].

12', 1.5 tons. (SM+2).

Language: One Local (Accented, Illiterate) [2].

Advantages: Acute Vision +4 [8], Damage Resistance 25 (Can't Wear Armor, -40%) [75], Enhanced Move 1.5 (Ground Move 12) [30], Reduced Consumption (one meal per week) [6], Telecommunication (Radio; Increased Range, ×10, +30%; Racial, -20%; Video, +40%) [15], Telescopic Vision +2 [10].

Disadvantages: Autonomous Unit [-3], Colorblindness [-10], Disturbing Voice [-10], Ham Fisted -6 [-10], Maintenance (2, weekly) [-10], Noisy +4 [-8], Restricted Diet (Fuel Oil) [-20]. Cultural Familiarity: One Local [2].

Skills: Guns (Rifle) 11 (DX+3) [8], Leadership (IQ+4) [16], Tactics 10 (IQ+3) [16].

Leviathan   *17,445 points*

The Leviathan class consists of robotic battleships. The precise number in operation is unknown, but believed to be relatively small. Each individual is slightly different from the others; this is only an approximation of their average abilities. London uses more Leviathans than any other Zone.

Attributes: **ST** 1300 (Size, -80%) [2580] **DX** 10 [0] **IQ** 11 [20] **HT** 13 [30].

Damage 131d/133d; BL 169 tons; HP 1300 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0].
Basic Speed 2.75 [-60]; Basic Move 2 [0].

500', 18,000 tons. (SM+12).

Languages: One Local (Accented) [4], Second Local (Accented) [4].

Advantages: 360' Vision [25], Acute Vision +4 [8], Damage Resistance 1000 (Can't Wear Armor, -40%) [3000], Enhanced Move 2 (Water Move 11) [40], Extra Attack 2 [50], Extra Head [30], Innate Attack (3" Gun Battery, 6d ×10 pi++; Accurate +3, +15%; Increased Range, 1/2D ×200, Max ×50, +60%; Rapid Fire, 1×4, +70%; Takes Recharge, 5

seconds, -10%; plus 6d×2 cr ex [6d], Followup, +120%; Explosion, +50%; Fragmentation, +90%) ×2 [2688], Innate Attack (12" Gun Battery, 6d ×50 pi++; Accurate +5, +30%; Increased Range, 1/2D ×500, Max ×200, +75%; Rapid Fire, 1×9, +100%; Takes Recharge, 15 seconds, -20%; plus 6d ×15 cr ex [12d], Followup, +155%; Explosion, +50%; Fragmentation, +180%) [9023], Payload (144 tons) [10], Reduced Consumption (one meal per week) [6], Telecommunication (Radio; Racial, -20% Short Wave, +50%; Video +40%) [17], Telescopic Vision +6 [30].

Disadvantages: Aquatic (Can't Dive) [-5], Autonomous Unit [-3], Disturbing Voice [-10], Maintenance (25, monthly) [-12], No Manipulators [-50], Noisy +4 [-8], Restricted Diet (Fuel Oil) [-20]. Cultural Familiarity: One Local [2].

Skills: Innate Attack (Gaze) 15 (DX+5) [16], Tactics 15 (IQ+4) [20], Strategy (Naval) 13 (IQ+2) [12].

Apollo   *3,134 points*

The Apollo-class automatons are dirigibles capable of directing the actions of dozens of units while pounding the terrain with artillery shells. Like Leviathans, Apollo models are uncommon and their abilities vary.

Attributes: **ST** 150 (Size, -80%) [280] **DX** 9 [-20] **IQ** 10 [0] **HT** 10 [0].

Damage 16d/18d; BL 4500 lbs.; HP 150 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0].
Basic Speed 1.50 [-65]; Move 2 [5].

400', 30 tons. (SM+11).

Languages: One Local (Fluent) [6], Second Local (Fluent) [6].

Advantages: 360' Vision [25], Acute Vision +4 [8], Damage Resistance 3 (Can't Wear Armor, -40%) [9], Enhanced Move (Flying, Air Move 36) 4 [90], Extra Attack 3 [75], Extra Head 2 [30], Flight (Lighter than Air) [36], Innate Attack (.30 Machine Guns, 5d pi; Accurate +1, +5%; Increased Range, 1/2D ×100, Max ×50, +55%; Rapid Fire, 16, +150%) ×2 [156], Innate Attack (3" Gun Battery, 6d ×10 pi++; Accurate +3, +15%; Increased Range, 1/2D ×200, Max ×50 +60%; Rapid Fire, 1×2, +40%; Takes Recharge, 5 seconds, -10%; plus 6d ×2 cr ex [6d], Followup, +205%; Explosion, +50%; Fragmentation, +90%) ×2 [2502], Payload 3 (9 tons) [3], Reduced Consumption (one meal per week) [6], Telecommunication (Radio; Racial, -20%; Short Wave, +50%; Video, +40%) [17], Telescopic Vision +6 [30].

Disadvantages: Autonomous Unit [-3], Disturbing Voice [-10], Maintenance (50, monthly) [-12], Noisy +9 [-18], No Manipulators [-50], No Legs [0], Reprogrammable [-10], Restricted Diet (Fuel Oil) [-20]. Cultural Familiarities: One Local [2].

Skills: Innate Attack (Gaze) 13 (DX+4) [12], Leadership 14 (IQ+4) [16], Tactics 14 (IQ+4) [20], Strategy (Land) 12 (IQ+2) [8].

Iris   *13 points*

The Iris class of automatons was designed to act as intermediaries between the Zone Minds and loyal or neutral humans, so only a handful of Zones have much use for them. The "wings" on this model's back are actually large radio antennae.

Attributes: **ST** 11 [10] **DX** 8 [-40] **IQ** 8 [-40] **HT** 12 [20].

Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 25 [0]; Will 8 [0]; Per 8 [0].
Basic Speed 4.00 [-20]; Basic Move 4 [0].

6', 250 lbs. (SM+0).

Cultural Familiarity: One Local [2]. Languages: One Local (Fluent) [6], Second Local (Fluent) [6].

Advantages: Appearance: Attractive (Impressive) [4], Damage Resistance 5 (Can't Wear Armor, -40%) [15], Doesn't Breathe [20], Reduced Consumption (one meal per week) [6], Telecommunication (Radio; Racial, -20% Short Wave, +50%; Video, +40%) [17], Voice [10].

Disadvantages: Autonomous Unit [-3], Electrical [-20], Maintenance (1, weekly) [-5], Restricted Diet (Batteries) [-10], Skinny [-5].

Skills: Area Knowledge (Local) 12 (IQ+4) [12].

Döppelganger   *136 points*

This unit is the most advanced yet produced, capable of mimicking human behavior and appearance to an impressive degree. Each is built independently from parts contributed by different Zones. Since the end of the Final War, such collaboration has ended, and the Döppelganger design has fallen out of production. Recovering the missing technology is a priority for several Zones. A close physical examination of the Döppelganger will reveal its true nature. This takes at least five minutes and a roll at -5 against Search or Physician. The Resistance may have Techniques to improve those defaults.

Attributes: **ST** 15 [50] **DX** 8 [-40] **IQ** 7 [-60] **HT** 13 [30].

Damage 1d+1/2d+1; BL 45 lbs.; HP 25 [20]; Will 7 [0]; Per 7 [0].
Basic Speed 4.25 [0]; Basic Move 4 [0].

Height and weight vary. (SM+0).

Cultural Familiarity: One Local [2]. Languages: One Local (Fluent) [6], Second Local (Fluent) [6].

Advantages: Damage Resistance 5 [25], Doesn't Breathe [20], Enhanced Move 1 (Ground Move 8) [20], Innate Attack (Electrocution, 6d burning; Followup, Punch, -25%; Surge, +20%; Takes Recharge, 5 seconds, -10%) [26], Not Numb [20], Reduced Consumption (one meal per week) [6], Telecommunication (Radio; Racial, -20%) [8].

Disadvantages: Autonomous Unit [-3], Electrical [-20], Maintenance (4, bi-weekly) [-10], Restricted Diet (Batteries) [-10]. Cultural Familiarity: One Local [2].

Skills: Acting 10 (IQ+3) [12], Area Knowledge (Local) 8 (IQ+3) [8], Brawling 11 (DX+3) [8].

Non-Autonomous Units

The bulk of automatons are non-autonomous, meaning that they depend on their brighter brethren to direct their actions.

Non-Autonomous Unit Template   *-248 points*

Attributes: **IQ** 4 [-120]; Will 4 [0]; Per 4 [0].

Advantages: Absolute Timing [2], Doesn't Sleep [20], Intuitive Mathematician [5], Machine [25], Photographic Memory [10].

Disadvantages: Automaton [-85], Cannot Learn [-30], Fragile (Explosive) [-15], Maintenance (1, weekly) [-5], Mute [-25], Numb [-20], Reprogrammable [-10].

Argus *varies*

These are the small units that provide senses to the Zone Minds. Despite their name, there are two subtypes within the class, with either audio or visual sensors. They are generally found in groups of four.

Attributes: **ST** 6 [-40] **DX** 7 [-60] **HT** 11 [10].

Damage 1d-4/1d-3; BL 7.2 lbs.; HP 18 [24].
Basic Speed 4.50 [0]; Basic Move 4 [0].

4', 95 lbs. (SM-1).

Advantages: Clinging [20], Damage Resistance 5 (Can't Wear Armor, -40%) [15], Doesn't Breathe [20], Extra Legs (2, SM +1) [10], Reduced Consumption (one meal per week) [6].

Disadvantages: Electrical [-20], No Fine Manipulators [-30], Non-Autonomous Unit [-248], Restricted Diet (Batteries) [-10].

Skills: none.

Vision Model [-283 points]: Acute Vision +4 [8], Telecommunication (Radio; Racial, -20%; Video, +40%) [12], Telescopic Vision +4 [20], Deafness [-20].

Hearing Model [-329 points]: Acute Hearing +8 [16], Telecommunication (Radio; Racial, -20%) [8], Blindness [-50].

Arachne *73 points*

The Arachne class keeps and Zone Minds and other automatons repaired and refueled. They are not programmed to fight, and will generally ignore intruders.

Attributes: **ST** 25 (Size, -20%) [120] **DX** 8 [-40] **HT** 12 [20].

Damage 2d+2/5d-1; BL 1280 lbs.; HP 50 (Size, -20%) [40].
Basic Speed 4.00 [-20]; Basic Move 4 [0].

12', 1 ton. (SM+2).

Advantages: Clinging [20], Damage Resistance 5 (Can't Wear Armor, -40%) [15], Extra Legs (2, SM +2) [15], Lifting ST +55 (Size, -20%) [132], Reduced Consumption (one meal per week) [6], Telecommunication (Radio; Racial, -20%) [8].

Disadvantages: Deafness [-20], Noisy +1 [-2], No Sense of Smell [-5], Non-Autonomous Unit [-248], Restricted Diet (Fuel Oil) [-20].

Skills: Mechanic (Robots) 12 (IQ+8) [32].

Ethon *-171 points*

Ethon-class automatons are mechanical birds with 24' wingspans. Reconnaissance is their role, but when cornered they will protect themselves with mechanical beaks and talons.

Attributes: **ST** 7 [-30] **DX** 10 [0] **IQ** 3 [-20] **HT** 10 [0].

Damage 1d-3/1d-2; BL 9.8 lbs.; HP 16 [18]; Will 3 [0]; Per 4 [5].
Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

4', 70 lbs. (SM+0).

Advantages: Acute Vision +4 [8], Damage Resistance 3 (Can't Wear Armor, -40%) [15], Doesn't Breathe [20], Enhanced Move 2 (Air Move 40) [40], Flight (Can't Hover, -15%; Winged, -25%) [24], Night Vision +5 [5], Reduced Consumption (one meal per day) [4], Sharp Beak [1], Talons [8], Telecommunication (Radio; Increased Range, ×10, +30%; Racial, -20%; Video, +40%) [15], Telescopic Vision +4 [20].

Disadvantages: Colorblindness [-10], Electrical [-20], No Fine Manipulators [-30], Noisy +1 [-2], Non-Autonomous Unit [-248], Restricted Diet (Batteries) [-10].

Skills: Forward Observer 5 (IQ+2) [8], Tracking 6 (Per+2) [8].

Hoplite   *-112 points*

These 8' automatons are the most common military units. They rely on an Archon to coordinate their actions, and are much less effective when not working in numbers. A phalanx of 12 Hoplites and one Archon is the most common detachment. They carry .35-caliber automatic rifles with extremely long barrels and fixed bayonets.

Attributes: **ST** 20 (Size, -10%) [90] **DX** 8 [-40] **HT** 12 [20].

Damage 2d-1/3d+2; BL 80 lbs.; HP 38 (Size, -10%) [33].
Basic Speed 4.00 [-20]; Basic Move 4 [0].

8', 900 lbs. (SM+1).

Advantages: Damage Resistance 10 (Can't Wear Armor, -40%) [30], Enhanced Move 1.5 (Ground Move 12) [30], Reduced Consumption (one meal per week) [6], Telecommunication (Radio; Racial, -20%) [8].

Disadvantages: Colorblindness [-10], Hamfisted -3 [-5], Noisy +1 [-2], Non-Autonomous Unit [-248], Restricted Diet (Fuel Oil) [-20].

Skills: Guns (Rifle) 11 (DX+3) [8], Spear 10 (DX+2) [8].

Fury   *88 points*

Furies are the most reviled of all automatons, intended to root out humans from fortresses and underground bunkers. They are extremely deadly, but because they are not very bright and have poor perception, they are relatively easy to defeat or evade when found alone. Unfortunately, they are almost always found in groups of three. Furies have bodies like fat metal snakes studded with 2' spikes, but their heads are sculpted like anguished women with bleeding "eyes" where the machine gun barrels protrude.

Attributes: **ST** 30 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%; Size, -20%) [80] **DX** 8 [-40] **HT** 14 [40].

Damage 2d/5d+2; BL 180 lbs.; HP 60 (Size, -20%) [48].

Basic Speed 4.50 [-20]; Basic Move 4 [0].

18', 2 tons. (SM+2).

Advantages: Acute Hearing +10 [20], Damage Resistance 25 (Can't Wear Armor, -40%) [75], Doesn't Breathe [20], Enhanced Move 1 (Ground Move 9) [20], Innate Attack (.30 Machine Guns, 5d pi; Accurate +1, +5%; Increased Range, 1/2D ×100, Max ×50, +55%; Rapid Fire, 16, +150%) [78], Long Spines [3], Night Vision +5 [5], Reduced Consumption (one meal per week) [6], Sharp Teeth [1], Telecommunication (Radio, Racial, -20%) [8], Tunneling (Move 8) [70].

Disadvantages: Appearance (Monstrous) [-20], Colorblindness [-10], Electrical [-20], Noisy +1 [-2], No Legs (Slithers) [0], No Manipulators [-50], Non-Autonomous Unit [-248], Restricted Diet (Batteries) [-10].

Skills: Brawling 11 (DX+3) [8], Innate Attack (Gaze) 11 (DX+3) [8], Tracking 8 (A) (Per+2) [8].

Non-Military Automatons

The widely publicized failures of the military automatons in the Crimean War depressed the still-nascent market for domestic automatons. At the time of the Final War, only a few domestic models were available; these primarily served as amusements for the wealthy.

Automaton Weapons

Weapon	Dam	Acc	Range	Wt	RoF	Shots	*Attributes:* ST	Bulk	Rcl
Archon Carbine	9d pi++	4	930/4600	29/7	1(3)	15	29†	-10	9
Hoplite Rifle	5d pi	4	760/3100	32/10	3(3)	100	16†	-15	2
Bayonet	2d+2 imp			2			16†		
Titan Club	6d×3 cr		1-5	300			100		
Titan Revolver	6d×2 pi++	2	450/4000	74/13	1(3i)	8	95	-10	10
plus	4d [4d] ex								
w/ canister	2d pi		80/200						

The Hoplite Rifle has a 60" barrel to increase the bayonet's Reach, and is ruggedized (p. VE27), for protection in melee combat. Note that automaton weapons cannot be used by humans, even with sufficient ST, due to their ergonomics. An armorer might be able to fit the components with a suitable grip, however.

Additional Material

- "[Reign of Fire](#)" by Werner H. Hartmann

Intromancy: A New Magick School for *Unknown Armies*

by Bevan Thomas

"You are yourself, no one other. Accept yourself, rely on yourself, and understand yourself. It is through you and the powers that you have that you will come to power."

In the end, the only one that you can truly understand is yourself. Other people come and go, passing in and out of your life like actors in a play, but you remain. Can you truly understand how another person thinks, how he feels? No, the only person you can fully understand is yourself. You see everything through the lens of your own feelings, perceptions, and experiences. Who you are defines how you perceive the world; who you are defines the world for you.

Everyone is his own island. You can trade with other islands, other individuals, importing and exporting favors, connections, and experiences, but in the end you are your own land. All must focus on cultivating the island that are their own souls. If you rely on other people, then you surrender your island to a conqueror, and are ruled by another. The world is filled with people who have sacrificed themselves to please others, and they have become soulless husks.

You have power if you believe in yourself, you have power if you understand yourself, you have power if in the end you rely on yourself. It is the power to stand proud, the power, to understand every inch of your being, the power to call no one else master. When you rely on others, many things become impossible, but by relying on yourself, all things are possible.

The central paradox of Intromancy is that its gaining power and understanding from defining yourself as an individual human being by isolating yourself from the human interactions that define ourselves as human. By understanding who you truly are, you lose sight of who anyone else is. You know yourself, but forget the world. The slang term for Intromancers is solipsists, for in understanding themselves, they often do not consider anyone else truly real.

Intromancer Blast Style

The Intromancer has an unusually subtle blast; it merely enhances his personal damage-dealing abilities, thus still requiring the solipsist to directly defeat his foes himself. Under the effects of the blast, even your barest touch can cripple an opponent. The blast only affects the Intromancer's body, so knives, guns, and other weapons are not enhanced. Unlike most other blasts, inanimate objects can be damaged (breaking bricks with a punch or smashing through wooden walls with a kick), and damaging the objects does not harm you (you can shatter windows while remaining uncut).

People do not make an unnatural stress check when witnessing an the blast unless you are obviously demonstrating superhuman power (such as slamming your fist through a wall). Most of the time, people will be unaware that you are using magick.

You can only combine the blast with a concentrated attack. If you split your fighting skill between several opponents, or attack a person more than once, you cannot add the spell.

Stats

Generate a Minor Charge: Succeed in a rank 1, 2, or 3 isolation check. Alternately, spend three hours in intense self-contemplation, analyzing your own emotions, thoughts, actions, and other aspects that make up you. While self-contemplating, you cannot do any other action that would distract you (so you could wander around the city lost in

thought, but could not, for example, watch television).

Generate a Significant Charge: Succeed in a rank 4, 5, or 6 isolation check. Alternately, spend 12 hours in intense self-contemplation.

Generate a Major Charge: Succeed in an isolation check of rank 7 or higher.

Taboo: Valuing another individual person more than yourself causes you to lose all charges. This includes attempting to sacrifice your goals, happiness, welfare, or life for them (however, sacrifices for ideals, concepts, or even humanity as a whole is perfectly acceptable). Furthermore, relying too much on other people is forbidden as well. It is taboo for an Intromancer to blindly follow another person's advice or orders. He needs to know enough to make a decision on his own.

Because of the self-focus required to be an Intromancer, certain archetypes are too focused on the community and others to be compatible with this magick school, and must be abandoned if this school is to be practiced. The following archetypes from the main book are incompatible: Executioner, Mother, MVP, and True King. Furthermore, the Judge and Necessary Servant archetypes from *Statosphere* are also inappropriate. Other archetypes are acceptable, and even ones such as the Healer or the Peacemaker can be used by an Intromancer. After all, the Intromancer isn't necessarily amoral, simply self-focused.

Random Magick Domain: Intromancy is about individual power, personal freedom, and self-understanding. You can use it to escape from a situation, understand some important aspect of yourself, or be completely self-sufficient. It is generally ineffective against your environment or other people, except to stop those other people from hampering you in some way. Because of the personal nature of the unnatural world and its profound effects on the individual, Intromancy can be used to grant power over it as well.

Starting Charges: Newly created Intromancers have four minor charges.

Charging Tips: It is very easy for solipsists to gain charges, though too much charging drives them insane, making them unable to carry out normal human relationships or react to anyone on anything close to a normal level. An Intromancer who applies himself can expect to gain 3-4 minor charges a week, but if he wants to interact with people he knows, he should probably purchase a sensory-deprivation tank and rely on that for isolation checks.

Intromancer Minor Formula Spells

My Own Better Judgment

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: Get a hunch (roll two dice and use them for your next roll). This manifests as a strong gut feeling.

Power of One

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: This is the Intromancer Minor Blast. You have to touch your target to use this spell (though skin-to-skin contact isn't necessary). You can combine this with a hand-to-hand attack (as long as you didn't split up your fighting skill) by making a successful attack roll and then rolling for the Power of One right away. Alternately, you can just touch your target; if you try this, give your fighting skill at +20% shift and then roll for Warping, but the only damage the attack does is from the spell.

Storm the Gates of the Hell

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: Summon up a demon who speaks to you telepathically. This spell does not give you any control over the spirit,

nor any way to get rid of it. For that, the significant Intromancer spell *Obey the Will* must be used.

I See Through Your Lies

Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: Tell if the last thing a person said to you was a lie. Alternately, see something for what it truly is (look through a disguise, recognize a golem's nature, etc.).

No One Will Keep Me Prisoner

Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: If you are currently entrapped, you break free (breaking chains, wiggling free of a choke-hold, etc.). Whatever holding you is unharmed (so if you are tied with rope, the rope falls from you still tied in its original knots).

Introspection

Cost: 3 minor charges
Effect: By spending three hours in self-contemplation (which does not grant any minor charges), you gain a better understanding of yourself and your failings. This allows you to remove one failed or hardened stress notch. This cannot be used to remove hardened isolation notches, but it can remove failed ones.

Master of My House

Cost: 3 minor charges
Effects: This purges the Intromancer of all unnatural effects that were created by anyone else (such as demonic possession, magickal effects, or astral parasites). Any unnatural effects are immediately ended, and any unnatural beings are driven off and may not attempt to directly affect the Intromancer for 24 hours. This even purges the Intromancer of any beneficial effects created by anyone beside himself as long as the effect is currently active (so the Intromancer would remained healed from the Epideromancer, but would no longer be affected by a Nacro-Alchemist's Mars Dust).

Intromancer Significant Formula Spells

I Demand Obedience

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: This spell controls a summoned demon.

Taste My Wrath

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: This is the Intromancer's significant blast. It works like Power of One, but is a lot worse.

Leave Me to My Solitude

Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: Anyone near you feels distinctly uncomfortable and must succeed a Rank 5 Self Check to come within five feet. When you cast the spell, all those currently within five feet of you move outside the radius. You cannot choose who is affected by this spell; it affects everyone. The spell ends after an hour.

Off In My Own World

Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: You become undetectable to all senses, though magick detection works as usual. This spell remains in effect until the next sunrise or sunset unless or you directly interact with a life-form (human, animal, or unnatural). Their presence disrupts your complete self-focus and ends the spell. You can affect inanimate objects while staying invisible.

Answerable to No Man Nor God

Cost: 3 significant charges
Effect: When cast on an individual (which can be an unnatural being), that person must succeed in a Rank 5 Self Check in order to do anything to prevent you from doing what you want for the next hour (attacking is considered an attempt to prevent). However, the person is under no obligation to help you. For example, a soldier would allow you to enter a restricted area and a librarian would allow you to take restricted books (though would not fetch the books for you). The person is able to act against you if he is no longer in your physical presence, and can willingly leave your presence (but may not know that that cancels the spell). Furthermore, a person will still defend himself from harm, and will not allow anything that would warrant a madness check, force him to act counter to his obsession, or adversely activate a rage, fear, or noble stimulus.

I AM

Cost: 5 significant charges
Effect: Through a focused act of will, you are able to exert control over the Statosphere itself. For your next action, you may use the lowest channel of an archetype at a level equal to your Intromancy skill. However, this must be an archetype you know exists, and you must not have violated its taboos in the last 24 hours. Furthermore, the archetype cannot be one that you are tabooed against channeling. If you are already an avatar, you may choose to instead have I AM either give you access to the next highest channel of your archetype at a level equal to your current avatar score or the first channel at a level equal to your Intromancy skill (which may be more useful if your Intromancy score is much higher than your avatar score).

Intromancer Major Effects

Bring yourself back to life; make everyone forget you ever existed; make sure that no one is able to enter your line of sight; understand all aspects of yourself perfectly; use any channel of an archetype not opposed to Intromancy.

What You Hear: The Intromancer

It is rumored that an Intromancer has managed to edit himself (or herself) out of everyone's memories, and become effectively a non-being. No one remembers his name or appearance, and whenever someone encounters him, they soon forget he was ever there, filling the gaps in their memories and associating anything the person did with someone else instead. It is said that this individual has been responsible for bizarre reports all over the world, and is currently hunted by both the Sleepers and the New Inquisition. No one has found him yet, or at least not remembered finding him.

Cooperation -- The Wacky Doctor's Game!

There's been a new breed of game that's cropped up in the past few years: the cooperative game. In this game, the players are not competing against each other, but rather they are (as the name implies) cooperating against a common goal. Although I'm certain there are prior examples (such as the ever-popular game of Solitaire with someone hovering over the player's shoulder, yelling, "Put the red Jack on the black Queen!"), the earliest official one I know of is **Arkham Horror,** but the most famous one is probably the **Lord of the Rings** board game. In this one, the players play a group of hobbits, dedicated to ascending to the top of Mount Doom and ensuring one of their members becomes base-9. And I got to thinking about this game because the Missus and I actually played the game a few weeks ago.

I think the high point of the game came during some of the minor "roleplaying" moments we interjected into the game. As a minor setup: The game tracks both the hobbits corruption (which are "hit points") and the advancement of Sauron along the same 15-step path; the hobbit tokens start on the #1 side and move right, while the giant imposing Sauron figure starts on #15 and moves left (toward the hobbits). If Sauron touches a character, that player is removed from the game. Since damage and/or corruption can affect players' characters at different levels as the game presents various challenges to overcome, it's not at all uncommon for the players' tokens to be at different points of the board, representing how close they're getting to corruption (and being eliminated from the game).

So at one point Nikki had managed to heal herself for a point or two; I believe this was her second turn in a row she'd done that, putting me about equidistant from her and the Sauron figure. This prompted the exchange:

Me: I . . . I say, Frodo: Do you . . . do you happen to see the giant sinister eye looming closer and closer?
Nikki (without hesitation): Nope!

In our third game we were actually successful against the game, having failed to stop the world's descent into madness and evil twice previously. And we had a lot of fun.

While **Lord of the Rings** may be the first one, it's definitely not the last, as a number of these cooperative games have popped up in recent years. It's even become "mainstream," in the form of **Break the Safe,** a [pleasing remaindered game](#) we got from Kay-Bee Toys this past January. In this one, players take the role of spies charged with retrieving four keys necessary to disarm a sinister plot of some sort. The game is real-time, meaning that it ends in 30 minutes or less (and if you get to the full 30 minutes, *boom!* no one wins! Sure, it was a simple game, but we immediately saw room for expansion, alternate rules, different complications . . .

In hindsight, the idea of the cooperative game -- while contrary to expectations -- is fairly obvious. While many might not like games where there isn't a definitive winner, I'm the opposite; I've seen games of **BattleTech** that took six hours to resolve, with friendships taken to the brink via rules disputes and problems . . . frankly, everyone who gets through that tour of duty is a winner in my book. (This is probably the reason I'm so drawn to RPGs; everybody plays, everybody wins.) Cooperative games offer many of the features of a competitive game -- social interaction, a definitive goal, the notion of winning and losing -- without the backstabbing that exemplifies many other games.

One of the interesting thing about cooperative games is that, once you're familiar with how they work, it's relatively easy to convert many games to this form. For example, the goal of a cooperative *Scrabble* might be to earn 600 points collectively. (Rules would probably permit some level of indirect help: "Gee, it sure would be nice if I had a 'T' to build off of . . .") You might try playing *Boggle* cooperatively by having a different goal . . . say, the team using every letter on the board at least once before time runs out. A cooperative game of *Talisman* might involve trying to ensure that one player defeats the Wizard's Tower in a set number of turns (say, 20). **Magic: The Gathering** could be turned cooperative by having a the players attack a pre-prepared random deck, which automatically successfully "casts" a spell against other player each turn (with creatures sticking around to hassle that player until the creature is defeated); the players have a certain number of turns to defeat this rogue deck. And **Monopoly** might be turned into a game that everyone can win by placing the components back within the box and returning it to the back of the dusty closet.

It's even possible to turn games into combination competitive/cooperative events; for example, if three *Scrabble* players

are weak and one is exceptionally strong, then the three might play cooperatively to exceed the score of the stronger player. And the classic game **Ogre** immediately suggests this game type.

Of course, a lot of people enjoy competitive games; it's fun to try to emerge triumphant among your peers. And, really, cooperative games might be a bit too touchy-feely for a lot of players. But cooperative games also eliminate many of the pitfalls of competitive games: that one player who's *way* too into the game and likes to gloat; that other player who's overly familiar with the game, and thus has an advantage; and so on. The only suboptimal player type who is more welcome in a competitive game than a cooperative one is the player who doesn't really care about the game; if the abilities of all players are required to achieve the victory conditions, then this "whatever" player may cause frustration for all.

So if you're looking for a way to breathe some new life into a classic game, consider how it might be turned into a cooperative event. Who knows; everyone might win playing a game where everyone *can* win.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Forgotten Futures IX: My Own Invention . . .

Written & Published by [Marcus L. Rowland](#)

CD-ROM; $20

Marcus L. Rowland's *Forgotten Futures* is aptly named, for between the Victorian era and the pulps of the 1920s and 1930s, there was still an age of imagination that is ill considered just a century later. Both in print from Heliograph, Inc. and on [CD-ROM](#), Rowland has been gamely showcasing the scientific theorizing and fantastic imagining of the very late Victorian and the Edwardian period. This has been an ongoing project for the author, exploring in turn through eight volumes, Rudyard Kipling's airship utopia of today, the Solar System as imagined in the early 20th century, the scientific adventures of George E. Challenger, Ab-natural Edwardian England, and the destruction of London via multiple methods. It should also be made clear that the price for the CD-ROM is actually a registration fee, which includes a donation to cancer research.

The latest volume is *Forgotten Futures IX: My Own Invention . . . ,* an exploration of Victorian and Edwardian weird science, engineering, and gadgetry. The CD-ROM comes jam packed with articles, images, and stories -- and all that before you get to the roleplaying material. And even that includes a copy of the Forgotten Futures rules in both HTML and PDF formats, plus summaries of the rules for those that want shorter versions. In this *Forgotten Futures IX* is as much a standalone RPG as it is a supplement.

The articles detail early attempts at building monorails, the telediagraph -- an early form of the fax machine, attempts at both color and 3-D photography (along with a selection of stereoscopic images and a viewer, though the author has converted them to anaglyph or overlaid double images for easier viewing), a speedy steam turbine driven launch, and on the work of Count von Zeppelin. Other articles include interviews with Nikola Tesla ("The New Wizard of the West") and his rival Thomas Alva Edison ("The White Magician"), and finally a look at some of the many ideas submitted to the British Patent Office. They come from several sources -- *The London Magazine, Pearson's Magazine, The Strand, Pall Mall Magazine,* and so on. Providing fascinating glimpses of forgotten devices these articles are both great reads and fine inspiration for the GM. The fiction, which includes two complete novels by George Griffith, a contemporary of H.G. Wells, all of which is fascinating reading and should help the GM gain a feel for both period and genre.

All of which is bonus material, for *Forgotten Futures IX* really gets down to business with "1% Inspiration," an in-depth look at the inventions genre. Accompanied with scenario hooks throughout, this introduction takes in the funding, the consequences (some good, but mostly bad), and the side effects of any such invention, and finally applying for a patent. One interesting note considers the outlook of an inventor of the period, who would prefer steam power to the untried electricity, sheer size over miniaturization, and the use of the commonly available iron and steel over rare synthetics and aluminium. The article is handily accompanied by a glossary and suggestions for further reading both other *Forgotten Futures* supplements and other roleplaying books, all of which are fine reading should *Forgotten Futures IX* not prove enough.

The first of the four campaigns is "The Queen's Own Aerial Hussars," which has a special regiment of the British Army waging war against the supernatural. Imagine the Edwardian equivalent of the SAS equipped with aerial gunboats or "Aeronefs," dealing with outbreaks of vampirism directed by Count Dracula. And that just about sums up the campaign. Included is a jolly exciting write-up of a raid as penned by Rudyard Kipling, details of army standard issue anti-vampire equipment, the regiment's anthem (actually Sousa's "The Rifle Regiment"), guidelines for aeronef construction (full details of which can be found in *Forgotten Futures VII: Tsar Wars*), and statistics for various monsters, some of which can be enhanced with the magic rules from *Forgotten Futures VIII: Fables and Frolics.* There is nothing to stop the GM from adding magic-using characters to the campaign, with the proviso that the

strongest magicians -- in keeping with the period -- are actually children. The sample characters for the accompanying scenario manages to reference *Blackadder Goes Forth, Highlander, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Dad's Army,* and *Ultraviolet,* and also includes a steam soldier, "Automaton Atkins."

By the time of "Swiss Movement," the Babbage Engine has been perfected. With its expertise in clockwork devices, Switzerland has come to dominate the field, its computational, record keeping, and document sorting machines along with automata of all kinds are now commonplace throughout the civilized world. And where they are widely embraced (such as Switzerland) or imposed from above (as in Prussia), there has been an increase in both productivity and employment. Rules cover the construction and playing of automata, along with various designs, the most notable of which is Prussia's "Krupp Stahlwächter," a very 19th-century Dalek-like Pfeffertopfsoldaten! Since this is a Swiss dominated setting, there is a central mystery at its heart (indicated by its subtitle, "Heirs of the Modern Prometheus"), but the included campaign, "The Kobold Project," sends amateur spies into Prussia to investigate rumors of a military prototype. Sample characters include Charters and Caldicott of Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes,* a teenage Miss. Marple, and a robot dog!

"The Space Bubble" is a campaign outline built around a late 19th century race for the moon. Under discussion are innumerable methods of traveling from the Earth to the Lunar surface and back again. They include being fired from cannons and catapults, rockets, and even teleportation, all proposed as entries for the competition sponsored by the *Financial Times.* The competitors and their methods are elements around which the GM can construct a campaign, and there are scenario ideas galore should he run dry of ideas.

The last of the four is also a campaign outline. "Past Out, Future Home" (a title derived from the word posh, or "Port Out, Starboard Home") is inspired by *The Philadelphia Experiment* and *H.G. Wells' The Time Machine,* and thus involves a new method of time travel. This can only be into the past and back again, the longer the physical distance traveled, the further back it is possible to go. While the past is immutable, persons can be brought back to the future, though this is strongly discouraged. Now this form of travel has become a new form of tourism, with for example, the *TS* (Time Ship) *Corinthic,* setting out on a 10-week cruise visiting Elizabethan London, Orkney at the time of the millennium, then Herculaneum, prehistoric Africa, and even the Triassic-Cretaceous period, before returning via ancient Athens. This is a fascinating method of time travel, again presented with a solid selection of scenario ideas.

Handily organized and easy to navigate, *Forgotten Futures IX* is well-presented and gives a wealth of information, advice, scenarios, fiction, and support in this exploration of this aspect of Edwardian science fiction. It possesses a penchant for an English arch silliness, but since this appears mostly in its selection of pre-generated characters, it is not a major detractive factor. What is readily apparent is that the *Forgotten Futures* series is very much a labor of love for its author and that its proceeds includes a donation to charity only serves to highlight his generosity. And certainly that labor has paid dividends, for *Forgotten Futures IX: My Own Invention . . .* is an indispensable resource for the GM of a Victorian Era campaign.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Carcassonne: The Tower

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Written by Klaus-Jürgen Wrede

Illustrated by Doris Matthäus

Tower by Christof Tisch

30 wooden tower pieces, 18 tiles, tile tower, & rule sheet; full-color & boxed; $17.50

The venerable *[Carcassonne](#)* series may finally have stubbed its toe. If so, the culprit in question is *The Tower.*

The game includes 30 tower pieces, wooden blocks that stack neatly atop one another, and 18 new tiles on which to get them started. Everyone receives a number of these segments in relation to the number of players -- more players means fewer pieces each. The new terrain squares are mixed in with the old, and play goes much as it ever has. You have new options, though, based on the towers.

If there's an empty tower tile in play, participants can stick pawns on their most recent counter placement as usual or they can begin a tower instead. Unlike meeples, a tower doesn't need to be placed on the same tile you just laid -- you can start any time on any foundation regardless of when it was played or by whom. You may also place your pieces on a tower someone else has begun; no one owns these buildings (at least, not at first). Placing the segment on the tile entitles you to take one figure prisoner from the playing surface this turn. The meeple collected must be on the same tile as the tower, or in one of the four orthogonal squares next to it (diagonal is a no-no).

As the tower rises, it can capture pieces further out. With two pieces, for example, it can reach pawns on the same tile and anything in the eight spaces out, two squares in all four directions. There's no limit to how tall the tower can go (though practically, anything five tall or higher risks falling over), but you can cap off the structure. The blocks' design also lets meeples stand on them, and if you're willing to give up one of your followers for the duration of the game, that "guard" stops anyone from building any higher there. The game says capping off a tower with a follower protects your followers, but it's unclear whether that unit is protected from kidnapping by later towers.

If two players capture each others' pieces, they are made part of a prisoner exchange -- you both have to give the other guy back his meeple. If you can't wait that long to retrieve yours, he can be ransomed for victory points. Giving three points from your total to your captor gets you your unit back.

The supplement comes with one other major thematically related component: a cardboard tower for stacking your tiles. About as tall as the Carcassonne box is long, it has two slots running top to bottom. The pieces no longer need to remain in loose piles about the playing area. Of course, now a single source of pieces has to be within reach of several players at once. For all that, it does exactly what it's supposed to do, and is quite a convenience until you have to put it away. They recommend not disassembling it (it comes preassembled), so a) schlep it around with you in or out of its box, or b) remove the cardboard insert from the original set so all the pieces you've collected with all these supplements fit inside. There's also some extra space at the top of the tower on the slim off-chance that a future offering will inject more tiles into play.

The high quality of the components for this series continues. You've got wooden blocks (though if they hadn't been

polished in this fashion they might stack above five floors with a bit more stability), new tiles, and the tower. The tower does its job admirably and makes for a much less cluttered table. The illustrations on the tower tiles show a little "C" of walls under construction, and while this blends in with the rest of the picture too easily (especially if it's too close to city elements -- both are light brown), it's not impossibly small. Plenty of other opportunities and reasons will arise that allow you to forget one of these important sites is nearby.

Purists are probably going to tear their hair out over this entry into the series. *Carcassonne: The Tower* provides perhaps the most vulgar mechanism for removing a player's annoying pawns from your path. It's not an unworkable game with these additions, but you're going to spend a lot of time rethinking how to position your pieces to avoid this new wrinkle. A fresh set of strategic considerations does spice things up, but since these tiles can be added to any free space on the board and built on at any time, it feels more like being shadowed by sharks than a predictable intrusion against which you can plan. If constant rules one-upmanship in supplements is a sticking point with your group, this may well be the first misstep in the *Carcassonne* line.

--Andy Vetromile

Where Do You Really Get Roleplaying: On a Computer or at a Table?

by Kim Bernard

My husband and I currently live in China, where roleplaying games of all forms are still in their infancy. So when my husband and I took a precious stack of gaming books. Our current supply includes **GURPS, Exalted,** and Wizards of the Coast's **Star Wars** products, along with some PDFs we've bought online.

Many people think of China as this dirty, primitive backwater. Well, they've still got a lot of dirt, but don't be fooled. They not only have electricity, air conditioning, and fast food, they've got the Internet. In major cities, you can find Internet cafes everywhere. In front of these cafes are huge advertisements for various computer games, most of which are MMORPGs -- Massively Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Games.

Well, after months and months of staring at Chinese ads for World of Warcraft, I e-mailed my mom and asked her to pick up copies for us. I sent her some money, and she shipped us two copies all the way from the United States. So, thanks to the wonders of the Internet, we're playing World of Warcraft on the U.S. servers even though we're on the other side of the planet. It's not our first MMORPG; we've have played a myriad of others and we had a good idea of what was going on and what we wanted.

Up until latching on to this latest Internet addiction, my husband and I had been playing **Exalted** or **GURPS** on a pretty regular basis. We are fortunate enough to have a few friends here who are also gamers. So we have regular exposure to both forms of gaming. It's a perfect shot to compare.

This brought up a good question: which is really, really roleplaying? Well, in my opinion, tabletop games are much more "roleplay" intensive. If you want to throw yourself into a character and talk to other people and expect them to react appropriately, play a tabletop game.

Why? Well, in a MMORPG your Game Master is the computer. The NPCs react in set, simple ways. Although the AI routines are getting more complex, and the games are getting more refined, there's still major limitations. What MMORPGs typically call "Game Masters" are not really people running the game at all. They're game police -- they watch for bad behavior, rescue players' characters from glitches, and track bugs. They don't monitor every word people say and try to bring them back on track with the game. With hundreds or thousands of players per GM that's impossible.

For this reason, you frequently encounter interesting failures of logic. For instance, in **World of Warcraft,** the Warlock class is supposed to be evil -- they're demon summoners and dimensional mages. The Warlock trainers in the human city of Stormwind are hidden in the basement of an inn, away from "prying eyes" like the mages, who might be angry with them. Yet plenty of the quest texts have references to your character's class, and many of the NPCs, even heavily armed guards, don't seem upset in the slightest that you're a Warlock with a demon following you around. In a tabletop game, walking into the same city with a demon in tow would at least get you thrown out of town!

The second major problem is the players. Although many of the **World of Warcraft** players are new to the roleplaying concept, or even to online gaming, the problems linger in every game. Most people either don't know how to or don't want to roleplay. In this regard, some MMORPGs are better than others. But most everyone resorts to "netspeak" to communicate quickly. Nothing breaks the magnificent image of the paladin, blocking his enemies with a shield while desperately casting healing magic than him yelling "OOM" (Out of Mana)!

The same problem also lies in tabletop gaming, although to a lesser extent. Most any game can break down into rules discussion or the random *Monty Python* discussion, completely breaking the mood. But because a computer game is less forgiving about mistakes and most people don't type 100+ words per minute, abbreviations and odd turns of

speech are common, even amid the most devout roleplayers. It's just easier to type "Add!" than "Another creature!"

But there is a catch to tabletop where MMORPGs have an advantage: visuals. The world can be very immersive because you're surrounded by someone's *very* vivid idea of what it looks like. You don't need any extra props, drawings, or detailed descriptions, because the place is in your face! This causes a lot of people to react more properly and not get confused when discussing places, people, and things with each other in character.

WARNING: Dramatic Logic Failures!

Almost all games, tabletop or MMORPG, suffer from what I call "Dramatic Logic Failures" -- for examples of tabletop instances, I refer you to *Murphy's Rules.* These logic failures generally center around places where the rules clash with logic. In most cases, GMs either jokingly run with it or they simply ignore the rules clash and say the logical things happen instead. A GM can also keep players' character logic in line by reminding them of things they would know.

But in a MMORPG, that person is absent and Dramatic Logic Failures abound. The Warlock example given above just scratches the surface. Why? Some of logic failures are pure necessity. Lots of things follow this course; they're made for player benefit, not characters, so they're not logical in the setting.

Most online games have "chat channels" -- places where people can talk with other people. Although most people can just "say" things, these says don't travel far, just like in real life. (But they do travel through walls just fine, which is really strange.) But chat channels work in large areas, and they frankly don't make much sense. Someone in a town on the other side of the forest can hear me when I talk? Is my character telepathic? Can he *scream* that well? What about guild chats, where you can chat with all the people in the same organization as yourself? They're in the pits of hell and you're climbing the stairs of the great central keep of the city, but you can talk to each other just fine! In most MMORPGs there's little to no justification -- they're there for the players' benefits, not the characters'. Many people try to make them fit roleplaying, but it's messy at best. They just do not fit.

In addition to the lack of logic of global chatting, most MMORPG worlds feel small because they *are* small. If a setting is actually on a more realistic or fitting scale, the world is so huge that players get tired of running around trying to find places. There is no GM to say "you travel for three weeks without anything happening." (There are exceptions where there are load screens that cover this, but they still don't fit because the in-game clock has little to no time passing.)

Finally, there's the death logic . . . or lack thereof. It's very rare in any computer game for anyone to die permanently. You die and someone resurrects you, or you die and turn into a ghost and go back to your body, or whatever . . . But you die and get back up. There is no terrible tragedy of death. Your little friend Alfie didn't die in that last battle, struck down savagely by the dragon. Most computer games are written like this -- save/load in single player games is the same concept -- because the computer is a rotten bastard of a Game Master who won't bend the rules on the best day of the year.

I'm a Hero! Really!

The final, biggest advantage to tabletop games is simple: you and your group are as heroic as you and the GM agree for you to be. You can save the world or just the neighbor's cat, or you can save the neighbor's cat and by saving the cat save the world. The world is saved and it's all better for it. Now, it may get screwed up in a thousand years or next week, but for now you can see it's brighter and it's time for a picnic.

In a MMORPG, you and your 500 friends will all be rescuing the neighbor's cat over and over again, one by one, until the quest is changed so that the neighbor's cat has indeed been rescued and now you need to rescue the dog. Oh, and neither pet has saved the world yet. It's still doomed. Not unlike the *World of Darkness* setting, MMORPG settings typically teeter on the edge of some terrible destruction, or at least hint at it really strongly. And keep doing so. Forever.

I W4nt My Ph4t L3wts!

That isn't to mean MMORPGs are totally lacking. They're not. Both types of RPGs are loaded with the ability to give you a sense of accomplishment.

There's nothing cooler than a dramatic ending to a campaign or even a battle where all of your character's utterly cool tricks really worked and you feel like a hero. You can get this out of either type of game.

An additional bonus to the MMORPG is the sense of accomplishment in the face of difficult competition. When you manage to beat down that bad creature that no one your level has ever managed to defeat before *and* you get the cool nifty magic item that is *so* rare, you feel accomplishment. You can wave around your cool gear and people can look and say, "Hey, look what he managed to do!" And you'll know it was cool because no one else around has your nifty item. You'll know the GM didn't give it to you at the end of the fight because he felt bad because the berserker got wasted . . . it's a rules lawyer computer!

But the Computer Is Your Friend!

The last, biggest advantage to MMORPGs is that they're on a computer. Wait a second. Haven't I been saying this is bad, bad, bad? There's one big advantage to a computer running things. Computers don't get tired and fall asleep. Computers can run 24 hours a day, seven days a week, available whenever you feel like playing. The one exception is whenever they take it down for maintenance, which can be at the worst times.

But remember: you can't bribe a computer with a pizza or cookies.

So Which Do I Play?

Well, uh, I play both (when I have time). The MMORPG is for socializing with friends from around the world and getting my cool loot, but tabletop is where I really play characters that are truly interesting to me -- that are truly more than the numbers. Over and over again in this article I've come back to the numbers. The computer has no emotions behind it, and the only non-numerical, non-rules stuff you'll really find in an MMO is with your fellow players, who may not be logical in the slightest. Tabletop is refreshing -- it requires not just number-crunching and tactics, but truer imagination. The rules can be thrown away when they stop being fun. The day we can get that with an MMORPG will be an amazing day indeed -- and I wouldn't be surprised if it's not in my lifetime!

Link of Interest

The videos "Episode 1: I Surrender" and "Episode 2: Why Surrender When You Can Resurrect?" These two "game films" neatly sum up the problems with MMORPGs and suspension of disbelief.

Fast-Learning Spells

for *GURPS*

by Demi Benson

For a game focussed on Young Wizards in Magic School, it is in-genre for aspiring wizards to learn new spells quickly in a leap of intuition instead of (or in addition to) through tedious academic study. In this style of game, once a mage has learned a single spell from a spell college, he may attempt to fast-learn another spell for which the known one is a prerequisite. The *[Magic Spell Charts](#)* from e23 are a great help for tracking prerequisites.

The requirements for fast-learning are short:

1. The student should meet all the prerequisites for the target spell. If the target has no prerequisites, then the student must know at least one other spell in the same college (this becomes the *base spell*); if not, the target spell must be learned through regular study.
2. The student should have seen the target spell successfully cast, although this is not required.

Fast-learning takes some amount of practice and preparation beforehand -- one hour or 10 times (10×) the usual casting time of the spell, whichever is more. The extra time is considered to be spent on recovering Fatigue, centering thoughts, thinking about past mistakes, and so forth. Magery talent will reduce the required practice time. e.g. Magery 3 learns in 70% of the time, so the minimum is 42 minutes or 7× the usual casting time. A student with Magery 10 or higher reduces the practice time to the actual casting time of the spell; in this case, Fatigue use might be more limiting than practice time.

Practice for fast-learning counts as Improvement Through Study (page 292 of the ***Basic Set***), either self-taught or regular if a teacher is present. If the student fails fast-learning, time spent on practice should be tracked in case the student fails repeatedly but accumulates enough time to earn 1 character point.

At the end of that time, roll vs the Fast-Learning Number:

- success means the student can spend an unused character point on the target spell ("Oh! Now I get it!"),
- failure allows the student to try again later ("I still don't understand"),
- critical failure means the student may never fast-learn that spell ("The way you explain it doesn't make sense. I'll stick to the book.").

If the student does not have an unused character point, the GM may either forbid fast-learning or add an appropriate quirk (e.g. "Obsessed with Learning Earth to Stone") or minor negative reputation related to studying habits (e.g. "Overachiever," "Teacher's Favorite," "Bookworm," or the like). All of these can be bought off later, but should be used as roleplaying opportunities.

The Fast-Learning Number must be 3 or higher for any chance of success.

Fast-Learning Number = Base's level + Base's Prerequisite Count - Target's Prerequisite Count + Modifiers

The base spell is the known spell in the same college as the target spell.
Base's Level is the skill level of the base spell.
Base's Prerequisite Count is the Prerequisite Count from pages 223-237 of *Magic* for the base spell.
Target's Prerequisite Count is the Prerequisite Count from pages 223-237 of *Magic* for the target spell.
Modifiers are from the table below. Modifier Conditions -4/-8 Each spell prerequisite missing* Impossible Any non-spell prerequisite missing (e.g. Magery, Animal Empathy) +1 Seen spell cast with careful explanation (e.g. by a teacher in classroom)† -0 Seen spell cast in everyday situation† -4 Seen spell cast while in stressful situation (e.g.

combat)† -6 Read/heard accurate, detailed descriptions of spell's effects, but not seen it cast† -10 or Impossible Read/heard sketchy accounts of spell's effects, but not seen it cast Impossible Has only heard of spell +1 Each doubling of the required practice time‡

* If the missing prerequisite spell has a higher prerequisite count than the target, the modifier becomes -8.
† These assume detailed descriptions and theory (i.e. good textbooks) are available to the student during practice. If they are of lower quality or missing, there is an additional penalty of -1 to -6.
‡ Doubling of practice time is open-ended, but at +9 (512 times regular practice time of 1 hour) the student will already have spent more than 400 hours on self-taught practice and should earn the 1 cp. This should only be used if the student meets all the prerequisites.

Example: Michelle is a student at a school of magic. She is studying Relieve Sickness (Prerequisite: Lend Vitality; Prerequisite Count: 3) and knows Lend Vitality (Prerequisite Count: 2) at 13. As none of her fellow students are currently sick, she convinces one to drink to excess so she can practice on him. She's seen the spell cast by her teacher in class so there is a small bonus. After an hour of preparation and going over notes, she's ready to try the spell. Michelle's Fast-Learning Number is 13 (base's level) + 2 (base's prerequisite count) - 3 (target's prerequisite count) + 1 (seen it cast with careful explanation) = 13.

Example: Tristan is studying Insignificance (Prerequisites: Persuasion and Avoid, Prerequisite Count: 10) from the Communication and Empathy college. He's read a detailed treatise on mind-affecting spells, but never seen it cast. He knows Persuasion (Prerequisite Count: 2) at 21, but does not know Avoid (Prerequisite Count: 11). His Fast-Learning Number is 21 (base's level) + 2 (base's prerequisite count) - 10 (target's prerequisite count) - 8 (missing prerequisite) - 6 (never seen it cast) = -1. This spell is far above his ability. In order to have any chance of success, he'd have to practice and prepare for 16 hours to raise the Fast-Learning Number to 3, even then he's still almost assured a failure.

Use in a Campaign: Young Wizards in Magic School

Using these rules would allow the students the free time to investigate creepy teachers, pull pranks on rivals, and romance other students all in-between classes, studying, and school sports.

Normally, professors will have their own pace of teaching; some professors would be irked if the student learns faster than the syllabus, while others might enjoy the chance to teach at a more advanced level. Either way, there are many roleplaying opportunities for the students in seeking out or avoiding certain instructors.

Slowing Down Advancement

If players try to zoom through four years of education in a single semester, the GM can control a student's advancement by limiting free character points, requiring Thaumatology rolls to understand teachers and textbooks, or making advanced textbooks poorly written ("Oh no! Another one by James Humphrey-Raynes; he's awful."), hard to access ("All the best books are kept in the Restricted section of the library. We'll need a note from a teacher to take them out."), or rare and unavailable ("Wayol's treatise on movement? No, none here, but I've heard the Court Wizard has one.")

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

Office Surprise Closet

by Alice Turow

In today's world, people are exposed to all manner of material in modern offices that would be called "mundane." While the items we have today would seem magical to people just a few generations ago, their commonplace nature makes them easy to ignore in the day-to-day bustle. Yet even among the boring miscellanea in the standard business supply closet, there are still items that can surprise those who grab them by mistake. These rarities are, for lack of a word, magic.

Here, then, are five reimagined office items with abilities that might still provide surprises and rewards for many different modern magic and near-magic campaigns.

Rewriter Pen

Shannin held the pen loosely, letting conscious thought flow from her mind. As she did so, she began to write, with smooth strokes and a deliberate purpose. "There is nothing left for me in this world," she wrote, "and death feels like my only escape. My only salvation. My only hope."

*"Well, this **can't** be good," thought Shannin.*

The rewriter pen appears to be an ordinary high-quality dark purple ballpoint pen -- the type that might be given as a graduation present or used by a somewhat high-powered executive. In fact, it *is* an amazingly high-quality pen; its black line is steady but versatile, the ink flows smoothly and unerringly, and its seemingly indestructible nature allows it to write at any angle and any atmospheric conditions . . . even underwater. However, it possesses a still more unusual quality: Anything written with the pen is "stored" within it.

If someone holds the pen without thinking of any specific use, it will begin to rewrite what it has scribed in the past, exact in every way possible. It uses the same strokes, pressure, and speed of the original writer. The only inconsistencies from the original writing will be in the quality and style of paper; if the original was written on a standard-sized sheet of paper but the pen's holder is using it over a blank notepad, it will probably run off the edge of the paper while rewriting.

Copies are stored in a first-in, first-out basis; assuming it's a different writing session, the time between the pen's usage doesn't matter (although if someone merely pauses during the same writing session, those pauses are duplicated). Thus if someone wrote out a grocery list one day, a letter to his lover the next, some doodles in the margins of a phone book a week later, and filled out his tax forms six months later, someone using this pen would write out the grocery list, letter, doodles, and tax form information one after the other. However, all copies are made in "real time"; if the letter took six hours to write, then it would take the person recalling the letter six hours to rewrite it as well.

The wielder of the pen does not gain any special insight into when the material is done or when the sheet of paper must be replaced, but he can usually figure it out via context of the output; if he is at the end of the page and the pen is taking an extra-long pause, then the wielder had better get a new sheet of paper out soon. However, this method is not foolproof; more than one user of the rewriter pen has been surprised to return to the item later, having signed a rewritten letter, only to discover one or more postscripts that significantly alter the tone or implications of the information learned.

The use of the pen can be interrupted at any point, merely by focusing on it; thinking of consciously using the pen is enough to stop it from recalling anything more. Skilled users of the rewriter pen find it effortless to shift their thoughts into and out of phase while making copies, but those new to its usage may need to make standard-difficulty willpower checks (or whatever is similar in the campaign's system).

Once a piece is rewritten (regardless of how successfully), that stored item is gone forever. The act of "recopying" the pen's output does not store that output again. However, there is nothing to prevent a person from re-recopying the letter's copied output back into the pen, outside of the skill of the wielder, who would need to "forge" or trace the original using the pen if the exact handwriting or style is important. For example, recopying a secret code is trivial if the user merely cares about storing the secret information; however, if the person used this item to recall a pen drawing of a famous artist, that item couldn't be re-stored later without trying to trace the original material.

The rewriter pen can store a seemingly infinite number of items; the biggest limitation seems to be the physical requirements of the time and tedium of using the pen to store information in the first place. Whether or not the ink cartridge can be replaced is up to the GM, and may depend on where the power of the pen truly lies; if it's with the pen itself, then the cartridge should be exchangable with any replacement that fits, but if it lies with the ink then using it up should cease the pen's utility (although this opens up the possibility of placing the rewriter pen's cartridge in someone else's pen).

Campaign Use

The rewriter pen is a fairly powerful item, albeit one that requires cleverness to utilize fully. For players, it's a good way to sneak or acquire all manner of information; trying to get information to others in the group is a mere matter of transporting a pen rather than pads of paper that can be intercepted or destroyed. If the pen were planted in the offices of an evil bureaucrat, it might store secret plans or correspondence (although reacquiring the pen might be an adventure unto itself). And it can be used for nefarious purposes; for example, someone getting a famous person's autograph with this pen has the means of recreating their exact signature (once).

For GMs, the rewriter pen is an ideal plot device for mystery adventures. It allows the players to intercept letters or clues in a way that might not allow much context; the PCs might discover this pen at random and they recall a letter that says something cryptic ("The ritual to summon Great Cthulhu shall be completed in two days in the basement!"), and they may need to figure out where the pen came from and when the original letter was written. It can also introduce a sense of urgency and suspense since its means of information retrieval is in real-time; if the heroes know the world is going to end in six hours, do they try to rush out ill-informed or do they keep transcribing the long, rambling letter of the person responsible in hopes of more clues? (Or, worse, go through 10 pages of Dr. Ensane's grocery store lists hoping to even get to a letter containing more clues?)

Other Worlds

The rewriter pen can work in almost any era, since the usage of ink to transcribe thoughts is almost as old as literacy. In fantasy campaigns it would obviously be a quill, stylus, or some other common writing instrument. However, even in more high-tech environments it's still suggested that the device not be upgraded to anything more advanced (such as a computer or typewriter); computers can already retrieve documents, and any form of information storage faster than handwriting takes away some of the plot possibilities. Curiously, the rewriter pen can also be used in fairly realistic modern or near-modern campaigns; some pen computers today can store the penstrokes of a user, so the only "superscience" involved is miniaturization and the means of recalling the stored information . . . perhaps via force-feedback servos.

Staple Gun

*Agent Laura snickered. "Just what do you think you're going to do with **that** thi . . ." Her words ended with the sharp pain in her shoulder mingled with the realization that she could no longer feel her arm. Then she passed out.*

The staple gun looks just like an ordinary high-quality desk stapler, and for the most part it is. However, when it is unfolded -- in the means usually used to staple posters to the wall -- and held in either hand with a squeeze-grip, it becomes a powerful weapon. In particular, it has the power of a large handgun (such as a Colt .45), but without most of the disadvantages. It is silent (except for the "click" of discharging a staple), has no recoil, looks harmless and is easily concealable, and can fire as many shots as it has staples.

Like the rewriter pen, whether or not the staple gun can be recharged depends on the nature of the force that gives the gun its power. If the power lies with the staples, then the staple gun is useless once the batch that is in the staple gun is depleted.

Campaign Use

Although a fairly silly device, the staple gun could still see use in some campaigns. For example, it could be the foundation of a bureaucratic vigilante in a *Tick* or *Mystery Men*-esque campaign. It would also fit in well on any professor's desk in the **GURPS IOU** setting, or in the palms of a pain-preferring pencil-pusher in a **GURPS Goblins** setting. It may even serve as a final hidden weapon of a master villain in a high-gadget spy campaign.

Other Worlds

The appeal of the staple gun is a relatively modern phenomenon (the stapler itself having been invented in the late 18th century), although the notion of using an office supply element as a weapon might be translated to other times and places. For example, there have been rumors throughout the ages of a mythical writing device that is mightier than a sword.

Nametag Stickers

No small part of Yolanda's mind was screaming out to pick at the sticker on her vest. But, she knew, doing so within the secret government base would be a grave mistake. After all, they were much more likely to shoot her on sight than they would the President . . .

These stickers proudly proclaim, "Hi, My Name Is . . ." with a blank spot on the front. These stickers could be used as any other name stickers, but doing so would be a waste of its potent power. For, if the full legal name of a person is placed on the nametag sticker, all those who witness the tag wearer will believe it to be the individual named.

The nametag stickers will only begin working at the instant someone can see the sticker (not necessarily being able to read it). As such, experienced wearers of the stickers tend to make fairly sweeping gestures with their bodies, ensuring as many eyes as possible will gaze upon the tag. The device will work through all known surveillance methods, including video cameras and photographs, so long as the resultant image has the nametag visible (or, in the case of video footage, the sticker is viewed by the witness at some point). Thus a photograph of someone wearing a sticker proclaiming "Hi, My Name Is . . . Lee Harvey Oswald" would be believed by all those witnessing it to be Lee Harvey Oswald.

The nametag sticker will disguise the form and voice of the person involved (or, at least, the person witnessing the sticker will believe it to be the named person's form and voice); neither gender, age, nor physical shape will prevent the user of the sticker from assuming any identity whose full name he knows. The nametag stickers do not bestow any other type of disguise abilities on the person wearing it; if the person donning the tag claims to be the CEO of EvilCo while stuttering nervously and wearing a tanktop, then those witnessing him will believe it to be the CEO of EvilCo, who happens to be stuttering nervously while wearing incongruous garb. The only thing that witnesses won't necessarily notice is that the person is wearing the sticker; observers who make a difficult willpower check (or the campaign's equivalent) will remember that the wearer *did* have on a nametag that said what his name was.

Witnesses of the sticker see the nametag wearer as the person they believe him to be, filling in the details with their own knowledge or imagination. If a witness doesn't know who a person is, the wearer projects his own knowledge as to what the person sees, although this knowledge isn't usually meaningful unless the person announces it. If neither the witness nor the wearer have a clear idea of who the named person is, the wearer projects his ideas of that person onto the witness.

For example, Agent Kate Carson is trying to sneak into the corporate headquarters of ACW Inc., helmed by the

enigmatic Artemas Capricorn Watterson. Kate has no idea who Artemas is, and has never seen a picture, but is wearing a nametag with that name regardless. Kate first encounters a security guard who knows of -- but has never met or seen -- Artemas. The guard sees Kate from behind; at first, he sees a slender woman, but as Kate turns around and he sees the tag, he sees a powerful corporate businessman whom he recognizes as Artemas (clearly his eyes were playing tricks at first). Later on, she meets a janitor who's never even heard the name Artemas Watterson (he's a temp, and he only knows the place as ACW Inc.). Upon seeing the tag, the janitor sees a meek, mousy middle-aged man (Kate's vision of what Artemas looks like); although Kate is still in "disguise" (the janitor doesn't see the "real" Kate), the janitor will probably require some convincing -- Kate's assumptive power means nothing to him. Finally, Kate encounters the senior vice president of the company -- a close associate of Artemas. Upon seeing the tag, the vice president sees Kate as the person he knows Artemas to be: a frail, steel-eyed old woman . . . although how Artemas (Kate) got out of her life-support wheelchair and started walking around will require some explanation.

Obviously the different iterations of who-sees-what can get quite confusing, and most people who utilize nametag stickers do so only for people they at least have *some* idea about, simply so they can know what others will see and how to act as that person. But, in a pinch, all that's needed is a name and a marker.

The power of the nametag stickers is such that almost no restrictions are placed upon who can be impersonated; living or dead, real or fictitious, flesh-and-blood or mythical, it makes no difference. The only restrictions seem to be that the person needs to have a name, and it needs to be a sentient person. Thus someone could not impersonate the woman who washed Jesus' feet (no documented name) nor the reindeer Donner (not sentient). The sticker itself also provides no other powers or abilities; for example, someone wearing the name of the Medusa would not turn people into stone, although it *would* still be a very freaky and frightening effect. (Of course, impersonating a religious founder in front of a devout person might have interesting effects, regardless.)

Nametag stickers are obviously very powerful. GMs wishing to limit their utility should merely limit their quantities (for example, only one sheet of eight stickers), since each sticker can only be used for one name; attempting to cross out the name or deface it will cancel its effects.

Campaign Use

Nametag stickers are a fairly silly option, although they can have their uses in more "serious" campaigns. For example, they would work well as fairly minor magical items in a ***Changeling: The Dreaming*** or ***Over the Edge*** game. They might even work as fetishes for more human-focused werewolves in either of the iterations of White Wolf's ***Werewolf*** settings.

Other Worlds

The notion of the "nametag" is a pretty new phenomenon, although it's possible to translate the base idea to other genres or settings. For example, a blank flag or herald might be paintable with the colors of any nation, permitting others who see that person's vessel or group to view them as belonging to that allegiance. In a setting with virtual reality, a RENAME function might permit people to see the traveler's avatar as a different entity.

Morning Coffee

Tony sighed as he did some mental calculations. Six hours a page to decode; 16 pages. That's 96 hours. "Well, the fate of the world's at hand," he thought, pouring his morning coffee. "So it looks like it's going to be four days straight. I can always sleep next week." Regular coffee has the effect of keeping the drinker more alert, thanks to the magical properties of caffeine. Morning coffee will keep the drinker awake and alert as long as he keeps drinking it. So long as the drinker consumes one cup (eight ounces) of morning coffee every hour, he *never* needs to sleep; he could, theoretically, continue working until the end of his life. In fact, drinking morning coffee means the person cannot sleep under *any* known means (including drugs or blows to the head), even if he wants to; his only choice in that circumstance is to forgo coffee and wait the hour.

However, morning coffee *does* have a downside. Should the drinker stop consuming it, he almost immediately falls asleep for a period equal to whatever time he should have been sleeping during in the first place (making a willpower check or system equivalent for each round he wishes to stay awake); no amount of force or effort will awaken the person before the end of the required sleep time, although he can still suffer damage or even die. The only way around this side effect is if the person drinking it hasn't skipped any sleep yet (for example, if he drinks a cup after having just woken up from a full-night's sleep).

The only other effect morning coffee has is to keep the drinker alive during this forced rest; no matter how long he slumbers as a result of the coffee, he will not need to eat or excrete during the sleep, nor will his body suffer any other deleterious effects as a result. However, upon waking up the person will be *quite* hungry, need to make a dash to the bathroom, and feel like a parcel of kangaroos crawled into his mouth to die.

As an example, Agent Link drinks morning coffee every day for six days straight. He's missed six days' worth of sleep, which is 48 hours; if he stops drinking it at the end of day six, he'll immediately fall into a deep slumber for two days straight.

Morning coffee won't prolong the lifespan, and the person drinking it will have the same caloric requirements as normal. However, if someone *were* to be on a permanent regimen of morning coffee, it would have the effect of extending his effective lifespan by a third, since there's nothing to prevent him from forestalling sleep until keeling over. The motto "I'll sleep when I'm dead" is incredibly apropos for such folks.

Morning coffee bestows no other benefits; it has no calories and doesn't provide any nutritional value (outside of any sweeteners or lighteners added), and it has all the other side effects of drinking a moderate amount of coffee -- slight jitteryness, a need to use the restroom, and so on.

Campaign Use

How common or rare morning coffee is will, obviously, have an effect on how it's used in the campaign. Again, if the effect is only in the coffee, then the result will likely be a relatively minor boost for a special event or dire situation. However, if the power is in the coffee maker (or the coffee itself is plentiful), it may well change the face of the game world. For example, agents who drink morning coffee permanently could have assignments that would be impossible otherwise. (It may also be the beverage of choice for government agents whose schedules require them to save the world in 24-hour jags.) Staying awake can also have a number of uses itself; for example, some Cthulhu-esque horrors might be unable to haunt the dreams of investigators utilizing this brew. Conversely, the threat to keep a fae away from the dream world would be a considerable punishment in a *Changeling: The Dreaming* campaign.

In addition to the benefits of being able to stay awake, the ability to store up effortless *sleep* is also a benefit. For example, the use of morning coffee could form the basis for a cheap "sleeper ship" to another planet. To survive a three-month journey, the crew would merely need to stay awake using morning coffee for nine months; they would need no food and only the respiratory supplies necessary for someone in a sleep-steady breathing state.

Other Worlds

There's nothing to keep morning coffee from being a relatively realistic potion; there are already experimental drugs that seem to permit one to stay awake for a week at a time (and without morning coffee's side effects). As such, it would find a home in almost any campaign at any time, although whether its abilities are caused by magic, medicine, or microbes would depend on the setting.

The Stopped Clock

"Boy, that clock on the wall just never seems to move," thought Arthur, trying to thread the needle without looking at it. "And it's a good thing, too, if I'm going to have any hope of sewing up Roxy's wound."

We've all had the experience of staring at a clock that didn't seem to budge. The stopped clock takes this one further; as long as someone stares at the clock, time *does* stop . . . for everyone that isn't the person looking.

For the person looking at the clock, he will see that time has stopped; none of the clock's hands will move, and if he is aware of anything else around him, he will note that all other activity has ceased. People are motionless, phones don't ring, copiers fall quiet, and so on. In all other ways, the stopped clock resembles a normal office clock, with a large round body, white face, black numbers complementing the black minute and hour hand, and a red second hand. Time passes normally for the person, although they can interact fully with the real world (able to move or take objects, attack or reposition others, and so on). However, any such interactions have to be done while looking at the clock, since any glance away from it will start up time again as normal. As such, doing anything complex should be treated for game purposes as being blind or in total darkness.

It is possible to do useful things while time is stopped; for example, nothing keeps the clock-watcher from glancing away, merely using the clock to slow things down. Thus a surgeon who darted his eyes back and forth between clock and patient might be able to slow down time to a half-pace, buying valuable time for him to take longer with the operation (although the constant eye-flitting might be worth a penalty to the doctor's skill rolls).

In theory, only one person will be stopping time at any one time. In the unlikely event that two people should look at the clock at the same time, they will both be "out of time" together; they can interact with each other as normal, although the moment that one's eyes gaze away from the clock that person will freeze.

These clocks are usually attuned to anyone, making them somewhat unpredictably dangerous. Some speculate that there are some clocks that are attuned to one specific person -- perhaps whoever puts in the batteries. If these models exist, they would be powerful weapons; an evil mastermind would be virtually unstoppable in his office with this clock and a gun with a full clip.

Campaign Use

Obviously the stopped clock is devoid of any realistic influence, although there is nothing inherently humorous (or humorless) about it, making it suited for any modern setting where there is sufficient supernatural weirdness to permit such a device: *Toon* and *IOU* on the humorous side, *Mage* and *Unknown Armies* at the other end.

The stopped clock can serve as an interesting conundrum for a modern campaign (regardless of where the clock is located); what if you needed to stop time for some reason -- say, to prevent a bomb from going off -- but the only way to stop time required you to deprive yourself of most of your vision and a great deal of your mobility?

Barring this, it makes an effective plot device for some mysteries. For example, if this clock were placed in a jewelry store or an art museum, a thief to whom the clock is attuned could use the power of the stopped clock to affect some amazingly brazen crimes.

GMs wishing to limit the power of the stopped clock may decide that it only works at certain times or certain days. For example, it might only be able to stop time in the period between 4:55 PM to 5:00 PM or on the day before a paid holiday. (Of course, the person utilizing the stopped clock could make those five minutes or that pre-holiday workday last as long as he wanted . . .)

Other Worlds

The basic idea of the stopped clock can apply to any time-keeping device: sundials, hourglasses, candles, and so on. In a suitably weird campaign, perhaps the first stopped clock evolved with the creation of the first mechanical belltower (probably in the 11th century in our world) or the first pendulum clock (in the mid-16th century); in these cases, perhaps the need for the inventor to keep a close watch on the clock somehow altered reality by enabling time to be quantified and "captured."

Oceal Havelock and Urias Fizzelworth, Loremasters

for *Over the Edge* and *d20 System*

by Caleb Dillon and James Martin

Background

Oceal and Urias first met nearly 20 years ago. At the time, Oceal was a young wizard and Urias a wandering cleric of Gruumsh. A party of adventurers were in need of a healer and a learned person; they couldn't find one individual to fill this need, so they accepted the aid of both Oceal and Urias.

Urias had lived as an outcast the whole of his life, mostly due to his half-orc heritage, and his human side had done little to soften his heart until he met Oceal. She was a simple girl, quiet at first until you spent time knowing her, but possessing knowledge beyond her years. She was kind to Urias, as no one else had been.

Urias took on the role of her personal protector. In exchange, Oceal taught Urias during every free moment they had. Urias was wise in the ways of the world, but not learned. At first, he was merely interested in being close to her, but over time, he found that he was retaining much of what Oceal taught him. The discovery of a rare *periapt of Intelligence* early on in their adventuring career aided him towards this end.

It wasn't until later that their friendship suffered its first test, which would divide their party and change them forever. Their group was seeking out a relic known as the *crystal hood* (see description of item, above). They found the hood within a subterranean cavern, but the items discovery awakened the hood's guardian.

During an intense battle near the hood's resting spot, a stalactite broke loose after being struck by eldritch energies, striking Oceal a lethal blow to the head. She lay on the cavern floor, dying; Urias rushed to her aid, yet was completely out of spells. In that moment, out of desperation, Urias -- muttering a silent prayer to Gruumsh -- placed the hood on Oceal's head.

What happened next was both wondrous and terrible to behold. The hood scintillated with light and fused itself to Oceal's head. Oceal slipped into a coma, but she was alive and the bleeding stopped. The immediate crisis was averted. Their companions slew the hood's guardian, and they returned to the surface. Urias carried Oceal the entire way.

A week later, Oceal opened her eyes. While unconscious, she has experienced vivid dreams of other places. Upon waking, she seemed to possess an unusual sense of clarity. Surely, she surmised, all this was linked to the hood. But how, she could not fathom.

She separated from the party shortly, and Urias -- who lacked the heart to continue without her -- followed suit soon after. Oceal needed time to take all this in and she wanted to be alone. Urias was heartbroken. He rented out a room close to the tavern she was staying at. Later, he would rent out the shop below as well, and Oceal would become a permanent resident of the tavern, which was a front for a secret society she was later asked to join. This society helped her ascertain the true nature of the hood in exchange for her services. She was granted access to a vast library, and guards for protection.

Urias became a dealer in rare books, a reluctant loremaster. He visited Oceal at the *Ghostly Whisper* a few times, but she was different somehow, changed, not herself. He retreated, sulking. They have since fallen out of touch, though Oceal often watches Urias from a distance, and he often inquires about Oceal through his informants.

In Campaigns

The Ghostly Whisper and Urias' shop can easily be inserted into any campaign world. Conceivably, they would more easily blend into a large metropolis than a smaller town or village, but if the city is too big, then other loremasters will be detract from the uniqueness of these characters and their relationship.

Oceal and Urias remain linked by reputation and previous association. Although Oceal gives out reliable information, there is a stigma surrounding her, not only due to the hood but also her affiliation with a certain secret society.

Urias is known to be less reliable when it comes to his lore; he just doesn't have the resources or aptitude for learning that Oceal does. However, much of his information is from street informants under his employ, therefore those seeking answers to more recent events in question, including local rumors, will probably find him to be the more useful.

Oceal falsely believes her hood grants her flashes of insight into the immediate future, and as such often finishes her would-be patrons questions for them. Urias, on the other hand, sees every question with a coin value attached to it, and so waits for the PCs to finish asking their queries before giving anything away.

Both loremasters are usually busy, and so will generally ask new patrons to return in a few days, if they can, once they've had a chance to do some research. If these new visitors are pressed for time, Urias will scoff and say something like "If you don't have time, I don't have time!" Oceal, on the other hand, will gladly tell what she knows.

The secret society Oceal leads could be just about anything, from a group of elite mages to a band of rogues. Remember, however, that this society provides her with vast resources in the form of tomes of lore, and therefore must have some access to knowledge of this sort; a psion benefactor works especially well.

Oceal has a small booth in the tavern that she never leaves during the day. She always has several books spread out in front of her. Oceal will accept an upfront deposit of 50% and will expect the other 50% when she completes her assignment. She'll give clients are a day or two to pay before she sends a squad of enforcers from the society to "make payment arrangements," hopefully without a confrontation.

Oceal sometimes asks for something of new visitors in order to seal the deal. This could be a lock of hair, an arrow, a coin, just so long as it belongs to the patron; if Oceal isn't paid, she will use this item for the purpose of scrying later. If the patron realizes the purpose of this token, she won't deny it but won't go into any depth.

Oceal is well protected. She has a bowgun attached to a swivel beneath her table, and the arrows are usually tipped with a non-lethal sleep inducing poison. If her life is ever seriously threatened, five to 10 bouncers (Ftr 4/Rog 1) can leap to her aid in one round; she can always summon more powerful allies using the charms off her bracelet of friends (1d4 adventurers, each of them level 8+1d12, 1 fighter, 1 sorcerer, 1 rogue, and 1 ranger). Urias always demands the full fee up front; he used to have a problem with adventurers coming to him for information and then perishing before they could pay him in full.As an ex-adventurer, Urias is capable of defending himself and won't hesitate to kill an intruder if he deems them a threat.

Urias' shop is small and cluttered. Dust coats everything with the exception of the books he's been working out of most recently. Torches in wall scones never burn down (care of a *continual flame* spell. The floor of his shop is wooden, with the exception of a large patch of stone 20 feet across. Beneath this stone is s secret room with no door, one *everburning lamp* and a small prayer alter dedicated to Gruumsh. The stone can only be moved by an incredible strength check (DC 35).

His shop is under the effects of a permanent *hallow spell.* This spell has several lasting effects, but one is a permanent *invisibility purge.* He won't risk harm to his shop or possessions, and so he usually casts a silence spell the moment he feels threatened, then uses his silent spell feat to cast *anti-life shell,* dealing out swift death to weaker foes.

If seriously threatened, he casts *meld into stone* over the stone flooring and sinks into the chamber below. There, he reads from a scroll of *word of recall* to teleport a safe distance away until the danger has passed. He will not hold back the next time he encounters his would be attackers, praying for spells like *harm* and *blade barrier.* Upstairs is the same story as below, dirty and cluttered. A *glyph of warding* is just over the arch of his bedroom door, out of sight to all but the most careful observer.

His room possessing nothing of value with the exception of one item. In an iron coffer hidden under the floor (search DC 20), is a fragment of crystal about the size of a small gem. This is a piece of the *crystal hood* that Oceal wears. Urias will go to great lengths to recover this fragment if it were ever stolen. If a thief were to try to sell it, they would find it of little value (5 gp). If this fragment were ever given to Oceal, and she were to place it against her temple, she would be aware of Urias' feeling for her. Perhaps with that knowledge, she might have the courage to tell him she feels the same way (possible side quest XP bonus).

Over the Edge Stats

Oceal is light framed and only slightly shorter than an average adult female. She is serenely beautiful with timeless features. Her head is covered by a translucent crystal hood that swirls with bright colors. She appears to be in her late twenties.

Urias is a lumbering tower of muscle who hides his brawny form beneath heavy robes and a faded, red cape. His wear multiple earrings and nose rings. He is middle aged for a half-orc.

Oceal's Traits

Loremaster -- 5. Oceal and Urias were once both members of the same adventuring party. They both retired to become loremasters after a quest gone awry.

Wizard -- 5. Oceal possesses intelligence beyond her years, and the crystal hood she wears gives her even greater insight.

Hit points -- 37. Oceal is healthy, but not particularly tough.

Secret -- Oceal's hood is the only thing keeping her alive. Without it, she would die.

Flaw -- Oceal, despite her outward beauty, is actually going on 50 years old. Her aging process slowed drastically after donning the hood, though she isn't entirely for sure why.

Important Person -- Not surprisingly, for Oceal and Urias, this person is each other. Urias is in love with Oceal. For her part, Oceal cares for Urias a great deal.

Urias' Traits

Cleric of Gruumsh -- 6. Urias' domains are chaos and strength. Urias tends towards a neutral disposition in life.

Hit points -- 71. Urias is robust and thick bodied.

Secret -- Urias has been in love with Oceal for years, but would never admit as much to her.

Flaw -- Urias is crass and forthwith.

Important Person -- See above.

d20 System Stats

Oceal Havelock: Female human wizard 5/loremaster 5; CR 10; Medium humanoid; HD 10d4+10; hp 37; Init +2, Spd 30 ft; AC 12, touch 12, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +4; Grp +3, Atk or Full Atk +3 melee or +7 ranged (1d4/19-20, masterwork hand crossbow); SA spells; SQ familiar, secret of instant mastery (scrying), secret of newfound arcana, secret of more newfound arcana, bonus language (Orcish), lore (Oceal adds her Int. modifier and her loremaster level

to all her Knowledge related checks. This has already been accounted for in her profile, below); AL NG; SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +10; Str 8, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 17, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Appraise +6, Decipher Script +13, Gather Information +10, Knowledge (arcana) +22, Knowledge (the planes) +22, Knowledge (religion) +22, Speak Language (Celestial), Speak Language (Dwarven), Speak Language (Elven), Speak Language (Abyssal), Use Magic Device +16; Scribe Scroll, Scry +14, Skill Focus (Knowledge, arcana), Skill Focus (Knowledge, the planes), Skill Focus (Knowledge, religion), Skill Focus (Use Magic Device), Iron Will, Brew Potion, Craft Wand.

Familiar: Oceal has a cat familiar named Tybalt that is often seen wandering around the *Ghostly Whisper.*

Wizard Spells Prepared (caster level 10th): *0*arcane mark, detect magic, open/close, read magic;*1st* comprehend languages, erase, identify(2), message;*2nd*alter self, arcane lock, detect thoughts, invisibility, knock, see invisibility;*3rd*clairaudience/clairvoyance, illusory script, nondetection, secret page, tongues;*4th* locate creature, fire trap;*5th*false vision, sending.

Spellbook: as above plus all; *1st* change self, Nystul's magical aura, Nystul's undetectable aura; *2nd*-arcane lock, Leomund's trap, locate object, shatter; *3rd*-explosive runes, gentle repose, sepia snake sigil stuff; *5th* Leomund's secret chest, Rary's telepathic bond, seeming.

Possessions: extensive collection of arcane tomes pertaining to spells, history (both local and regional), the planes, and other lore, candle of truth (always in her booth), stone of alarm (hidden in a wooden chest, which itself rests on the Ethereal Plane, care of a *Leomund's secret chest* spell), braclet of friends (4 charms remaining), dust of tracelessness, crystal hood of scying, masterwork handcrossbow (attached to a swivel beneath the table of her booth), 100gp.

Crystal Hood of Scrying: Though once believed to have been of Arcane origins, this unique relic is actually a psionic item. It was conceived of as a prototype for a new type of crystal mask, intented to be worn like a helm. It will comfortably fit a female human, elf, or half-elf of average size. The hood is made of nearly transparent crystal, but when donned the smooth faces of the crystal hood swirl with colors, bright pink, blue, or violet hues, depending on the wearers mood.

The hood grants the wearer access to the psionic power *Remote Viewing.* (If the GM does not have access to the **Expanded Psionics Handbook,** then substitute the *Scrying* spell for this power). The wearer of the hood need not be a psionic character, nor do they need a pool of power points to activate the hood; merely donning it is enough. The hood mentally "links" to whoever dons it, so that they can utilize the *remote viewing* power; however, that is all.

If the wearer is a psionic being, however, then the full range of the hood's powers are revealed. The following psionic powers can be used through the hood while activating its *Remote Viewing* power: *elfsight, darkvision, expanded vision,* and *sensitivity to psychic impressions.* The following powers have a 5% chance per user level of operating correctly: *mindlink, lesser mindlink, forced mindlink, detect psionics, detect thoughts,* and *missive.* Once per day the user may attempt to implant a *suggestion* (as the power, DC 14).

Mindless undead, beings with an intelligence score of less than 3, and beings immune to psionic powers are unable to activate this device when donning it.

The crystal hood, unfortunately, was damaged (a chip has been broken off and is missing) at the time it was donned by its present wearer, Oceal. The mental "linking," in her case, was permanent; the hood literally fused itself to her skull and brain tissue. The hood was never designed for this sort of symbiosis. As a result, each round Oceal uses the crystal hood she must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 10 + 1/round spent concentrating) or pass out due to the intense migraines use of this item causes her. So far, the benefits the hood provides have far outweighed its perils. However, if Oceal ever found a way to remove the hood, or it was destroyed while she was still wearing it she would soo n thereafter die due to major hemorrhaging of the brain. Physically, the crystal hood has same characteristics of a psycrystal (AC13, hardness 8, and 20 hit points) and "regenerates" its crystal matrix in exactly the same manner.

Manifester Level: 10th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Universal Item, *remote viewing, see invisibility, true seeing, detect*

thoughts; Market Price ; *Weight:* 5 lb.

Urias Fizzelworth: Male half-orc cleric 6/loremaster 5; CR 11; Medium humanoid; HD 6d8+12 plus 5d4+10; hp 71; Init +3, Spd 30 ft; AC 9, touch 9, flat-footed 9; Base Atk +7/+2; Grp +9, Atk or Full Atk +10/+5 melee (1d8/×2, masterwork war club; counts as a masterwork heavy mace or +7/+2 ranged (1d8/×3, masterwork shortspear); SA turn undead 2/day (2d6+5, 6th), spells; SQ Half-orc traits, darkvision, secret of health, the lore of true stamina, secret of instant mastery (Knowledge, the planes), bonus language (Elven), lore (Urias adds his Int. modifier and his loremaster level to all his Knowledge related checks. This has already been accounted for in his profile, below); AL CG; SV Fort +10, Ref +3, Will +13; Str 15, Dex 8, Con 14, Int 14, Wis 15, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Alchemy +4, Appraise +4, Concentration +8, Decipher Script +9, Knowledge (arcana) +12, Knowledge (the planes) +8, Knowledge (religion) +12, Speak Language (Elven), Speak Language (Dwarven), Use Magic Device +6; Combat Casting, Improved Critical (war club), Silent Spell, Skill Focus (Knowledge, the planes).

Half-orc Traits For all special abilities and effects, a half-orc is considered an orc.

Cleric Spells Prepared (caster level 11th): 0detect magic(3), detect poison (2), read magic;*1st* (2), detect evil, detect good, divine favor, protection from law^D , shield of faith;*2nd* endurance, hold person (DC 14), silence (DC 14);*3rd* meld into stone, searing light; *4th*giant vermin, discern lies, spell immunity^D, tongues;*5th* mightD, slay living; *6th*anti-life shell, stoneskin^D.

$^D:$ Domain Spell. Domains: Chaos (cast chaos spells at +1 caster level); Strength (gain a supernatural enhancement bonus to Strength equal to your level 1/day that last 1 rounds as a free action).

Possessions: periapt of Intelligence +2 (functions as a periapt of Wisdom but the modifier applies to Intelligence instead), ring of sustenance, brooch of shielding, cape of the mountebank (kept very dirty, to maintain the appearance that this cape is worthless), 600 gp.

Quotes

Oceal: "Welcome to the *Ghostly Whisper,* weary travelers. Ask your questions. No, wait, I already know what you will say."

Urias: "Who are you and what business have you in my shop? You seek answers, very well then. I have many, but they're not free. Nothing is."

Alyson Rossini, World Jumper

for *GURPS Reign of Steel/Infinite Worlds*

by Rickey Ciulla

For the first couple of decades, Alyson Rossini lived a fairly normal life. Her parents divorced when she was six after her father -- a former AMA doctor -- was discharged for his use of esoteric Chinese medicine on patients. When she was old enough, Alyson began working for her father in a small clinic in Seattle, Washington's Chinatown. While her father ran the clinic, Alyson ran the front desk. Times were lean, but they made enough to live. On her sixteenth birthday, she watched with the world as the Shang Ti moon base was established. In 2032, Alyson turned 23; shortly thereafter, the world began to unravel with the first Apocalypse plagues.

Alyson's world slowly died, but she survived. The first years were hard, too hard for anyone. When Alyson turned 26, she buried her father in a small field 20 miles outside of Salem, Oregon. She and he had survived far longer than most against the plagues; they'd treated many over the years, helping whomever they could. Although never formerly trained, Alyson knew as much as her father.

Alyson lived among the horror of a dying planet and its rule by intelligent machines, as a member of a nomad pack. Trading her services to Junk Rat nests in various cities for temporary food and shelter, Alyson's life was one of contant travel, never able to put down roots. Then, in 2047, she discovered what she believed was the miraculous ability to travel in time.

Infinity Unlimited suffered an accident six months ago as they prepared to receive a group of agents from Echo 44 (local year 1983) on quantum 6. An unfortunate transfer error sent the conveyor to the worldline of Steel (Infinity's designation); the Conveyor, and everyone in it, arrived in many little pieces. Nothing survived that was recognizable as cross-world technology, but one of the agents, being something of a souvenir fiend, carried a U.S. quarter from that echo. Alyson got her hands on this innocuous token as she helped her pack and some accommodating Junk Rats scrounge for food near the remains of the conveyor near Portland, Oregon. The quarter was all the unwitting world jumper needed. In September, the pack lost its leader to an exterminator attack and stumbled onto a traitor in their midst. The pack's second in command (a Moscow Info Commando doing side work for Vancouver's zone mind in exchange for Vancouver letting Moscow's agents search for remaining human culture) was put down just before he led them into another exterminator trap.

During the chaos of the attack, Alyson jumped away and ended up in Salem, Oregon. Where seconds before there had been a dead town and dry pond bed sat a town full of humans and a lake full of water. Alyson had unknowingly jumped onto Echo 44. Upon her return to her world (from what she believed was the past of Steel), she began working with her nomad pack to smuggle other humans out of Zone Vancouver, and into the "past."

Alyson doesn't know the half of her ability, and she's really in the dark. Alyson is Steel's first world jumper; she's not yet able to cross the quantum barriers, and can only travel to other worlds in Quantum 6. In addition, she's also limited to traveling to worlds in which she's held a piece of, which explains why Alyson believes her ability to time travel is limited to the year 1983.

over the last six weeks, Alyson and her group have made a half dozen trips into the past with Vancouver humans. Her efforts have not gone unnoticed. Vancouver's gotten wind of the mysterious doctor offering people an escape from the Zone. It doesn't believe the talk of time travel, and is content to ignore the problem; it suspects Moscow has leaked the tale to Brisbane, though it has no evidence yet. Brisbane's been poking about Vancouver with Redjacks, Lilliths, and collaborators, but hasn't found anything yet either.

She has also drawn the attention of Infinity and Centrum. Both agencies have detected numerous incursions into Echo 44 over the last six weeks. Currently, each agency suspects the other is engaged in covert actions to cause the echo to

shift, so they've stepped up surveillance there. Neither agency realizes it's a world jumper from the Steel world line.

Campaign Use: Alyson makes an excellent PC for a ***Reign of Steel*** game that eventually branches out into an Infinity Unlimited or Centrum game. She could be an NPC that players as Infinity or Centrum agents attempt to recruit, silence, or spirit away to Coventry. PCs might also be robots by the local Zone Mind sent to capture her for questioning, or might be native humans of the Steel World line, attempting to keep the doctor safe while she does her miraculous work. The action takes place mostly in Zone Vancouver but might carry over into Echo 44. Brisbane would be very interested in getting Alyson into its possession. Both Infinity and Centrum fear the Brisbane Zone mind developing parachronic travel, enabling it to wreak havoc on the worlds in Quantum 6, especially the Echos.

Alyson Rossini   *100 points*

Appearance: Irish-Italian heritage. Scruffy and thin looking. Short, thick, curly, dark hair. Dull brown eyes. 39 years old. Just over 5'6". Usually dressed in patchwork scrounged clothing with a ratty U.S. army jacket.

Attributes: **ST** 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 11 [10].

Basic Move 5; Speed 5.25.
Basic Damage: thrust 1d-2 swing 1d
Dodge: 8

Advantages: Resistant to Disease (+8) [5], Healer Talent/1 [10], Jumper [World] - Tunnel with "Takes Extra Time (1 minute) and Limited Use: Once Per Day" (+16%), Attunement Required (-20%), Drift (-15%), Special Movement (-10%), Limited Quanta: One Quanta Only (-15%) [46]

Disadvantages: Sense of Duty: Small Group (Nomad Pack) [-5], Stuttering [-10], Code of Honor: Healers [-5], Social Stigma: Outlaw [-15], Light Sleeper [-5], Chronic Pain: (Mild arthritis in left knee); Mild, 2 Hours, (-9) [-5]

Quirks: Responsive, Nervous stomach, Humble, Deeply self conscious about her stutter, Only rides her motorcycle when absolutely necessary [-5]

Skills: Diagnosis-13 [4], Expert Skill: Epidemiology-13 [4], Naturalist-13 [4], Pharmacy: Herbal-13 [4], Physiology-13 [4], Esoteric Medicine-13 [4], Vetinary Medicine-12 [2], Autohypnosis-10 [1], Breath Control-10 [1], Meditation-10 [1], First Aid-13 [1], Bicycling-10 [1], Driving: Motorcycle- 9 [1], Hiking-10 [1], Observation-11 [1], Scrounging-12 [1], Survival: Forest-11 [1], Swimming-11 [1], Urban Survival-12 [1]

Notes: Alyson suffers from arthritis in her left knee on occasion from an old motorcycle injury. When it flares up, she treats it with a regiment of acupuncture and acupressure. This usually dissipates any pain within 2 hours.

Equipment: The pack share just about everything, but she still carries some photos of her father, her, and her mother (who died when Alyson was 12). She is equipped with a semi-automatic barretta, a battered army jacket, and odds and ends such as a swiss army knife. She often rides a mountain bike, or -- when long travel is called for -- a motorcycle.

Quote: "Y-y-you'll s-s-see a sh-shimmer in the air; j-j-just follow me. Things will be b-b-better, I p-p-p-promise."

Pyramid Review

HardNova][: Space Opera Adventures

Published by [Politically Incorrect Games](#)

Written by Brett Bernstein & Matt Drake

Illustrated by Chris Martinez & Brett Bernstein

HardNova][: Space Opera Adventures (1.7 MB 74-page B&W PDF), HardNova][Enhancement Pack (1 MB 13-page B&W PDF), & Miniseries Alpha: The Vanguard (1.2 MB 28-page B&W PDF); $7.50

Each entry in Politically Incorrect Games' *genreDiversion* line from is designed to do two things. First to emulate its given genre -- whether post holocaust in [Earth*AD:* **Post-Holocaust Adventures,**](#) cops 'n' robbers '80s-TV-style in [*Vice Squad: Eighties Police Adventure*](#), or a "future under occupation" as depicted in [***The Colonies RPG.***](#) Second to drop a gaming group into a game and then get them out again, to return them to a longer, more involved campaign. Thus we have both the genre and diversion of the line's title.

Yet the fourth entry in the series offers up something more than the earlier lighter, more throwaway entries. The first of these is the **genreDiversion *i*** new mechanics, designed to both easier to handle and compatible with the publisher's other systems, *Impressa Modular Roleplaying* and *Active Exploits Diceless.* The second is that *HardNova][: Space Opera Adventures* comes with not just a core rulebook that contains merely the rules and everything necessary to play, but also an *Enhancement Pack* and a campaign in the form of *Miniseries Alpha: The Vanguard.* All three are available as separate PDF files, or in a decently priced combined package.

The mechanics come in two versions: Basic and Advanced Task Resolution. Both require rolls under or equal to the sum of an attribute (rated from zero to five) and Skill (rated zero to eight) on two six-sided dice. Under the Basic method, extra dice are rolled to represent bonuses or penalties to a task. The two lowest dice count if bonus dice have been added, the two highest if penalty dice instead. The Advanced method levies a difficulty directly from the attribute-skill total rolled on the two dice, which, though simple enough, is over-explained. Further, as written, the Advanced methods of handling critical success and failure (termed Triumphs and Calamities) do not feel as intuitive as the authors intend. Yet get past this stumbling block and the mechanics work easily enough, handling both character action *and* starship action.

A character is defined by five attributes (Fitness, Awareness, Creativity, Reasoning, and Influence), determined by rolling for them, or distributing 12 points between the five. Some races have maximum limitations on their attributes. Another 30 points are assigned to skills. A character can also possess Gimmicks, special abilities that can be either personal or intrinsic to his race. Racial Gimmicks are free, while personal ones can be purchased with skill points or balanced with the selection of a Detrimental Gimmick. Beneficial Gimmicks are categorized as cultural, for example Elite Status or Multilingual; enhancements or bio-mechanical augmentations; mechanical for robot characters; and psionic. Optional rules allow a character to have two Gimmicks for free.

In keeping with the game's simplicity, Starships are defined in a similar fashion. Three abilities (Speed, Handling, and Sensors) are rated from -5 to +5, while Frame and Shields ratings range from zero to five. Like character Health, a Starship's Integrity is rated from one to five in two statistics. Mechanical Stress represents wear and tear on a ship's engines and power systems, while starship Gimmicks such as Cargo Bay, Hyperspace Generator and Stasis Generator add technological and design elements. The design process is easy enough, helped by several examples along with the

equipment listings. Pleasingly, both starship and personal combat is kept simple.

As the title suggests, the genre for *HardNova][: Space Opera Adventures* is Space Opera. Its setting portrays Earth as a galactic superpower, the leading government in the two-century-old alliance, the United Sovereign Worlds. Known as the USU (because various alien species cannot handle the concept of the "double u"), it was founded following a bitter war with the Tarkosians, a race of humanoids dependent on upon bio-enhancements for survival. The founding members included the humans of Earth; Centaurians, a psionic human variant; and the chimpanzee-like Digronians, whose society is tribal and patriarchal. This trio has been joined by the matriarchal, bureaucratic, and insectoid Kt'sorii; the hugely overweight Migado, so hampered with redundant organs that they need bio-support frames or psychokinesis in order to be mobile; and the synthetic X-ans, often found as a space going machine species. More recently the nanite-dependent Tarkosians have been granted membership of the USU, while the worm-like Ruthdii Komar represent a threat in the border region known as Living Frontier.

Technology-wise, the *HardNova][* setting involves universal translators, faster-than-light communications, and star travel via both hyperdrive engines and hyperspace gates. Common weapons include blasters and EP or Explosive Projectile guns, while plasma swords can be found on the black market. Starship weaponry includes laser canons and batteries, particle cannons and hunter-killer missiles.

This being a fairly generic space opera/science fiction RPG, all sorts of adventures are possible. The four included cover exploration missions, going to the rescue of a colony, investigating outbreaks of piracy, and a murder investigation. The suggested set-up has the characters as members of the USU Rangers, a galactic law enforcement agency. Other support includes rules for creating worlds and alien creatures; adapting the game to three other sets of mechanics: *Impressa Express,* the *Impressa Modular Roleplaying System,* and the original *HardNova*; along with reference sheets, plenty of sample ships, and NPCs. The core rulebook for *HardNova][* even includes paper disposable dice, ready to cut out and glue together!

On its own, *HardNova][* offers the gamer a decent, solid, but not spectacular entry into the space opera genre. The rules and setting are all gameable enough, but fortunately things improve with the two supplements available. The *HardNova][Enhancement Pack* provides rules for handling drugs, a selection of new Gimmicks for both characters and starships, and new starship weaponry, but in the main it focuses on a new race. The Gillie is a short, dextrous furry biped with a prehensile tail. Mute, but telepathic, the species is yet to advance beyond the medieval era. The Gillies are also the focus for the *Enhancement Pack's* single scenario, which involves the search for a powerful and deadly new drug. It's decent enough support, but *Miniseries Alpha: The Vanguard* is better. This is a five-part campaign that has the characters crewing a tough little scout ship, part of a task force to assigned protect an important trade route from the aggressive Ruthii Komar. This campaign involves a lot of ship-to-ship combat, perhaps too much, but it is enjoyable nevertheless, and if the game feels close to any one influence, in this campaign it is with *Babylon 5.* Elsewhere it feels more reminiscent of TSR's *Star Frontiers.*

As a whole, *HardNova][: Space Opera Adventures* offers two things: a set of tools and rules for the GM to construct and run a game of his own, and a setting within which to run a campaign. The latter is certainly fully supported with both the scenarios found in the rulebook and the *Enhancement Pack,* and the campaign found in *Miniseries Alpha: The Vanguard.* If the game has a weakness, it comes in the writing, which at times over-complicates the rules. Yet the amount of material more than makes up for this, ensuring that *HardNova][: Space Opera Adventures* is a complete package with both plenty to play with and value for money.

--Matthew Pook

Canterbury Tales of the Unexpected

"This year on the Sunday before the Feast of Saint John the Baptist, after sunset when the moon was first seen, a marvellous sign was seen by five or more men sitting facing it. Now, there was a clear new moon, as was usual at that phase, its horns extended to the east; and behold suddenly the upper horn was divided in two. Out of the middle of its division a burning torch sprang, throwing out a long way, flames, coals and sparks. As well, the moon's body which was lower, twisted as though anxious, and in the words of those who told me and had seen it with their own eyes, the moon palpitated like a pummelled snake. After this it returned to its proper state. . . . This to me who writes this was told by those men who with their own eyes saw it, and who are willing to swear an oath that they have not added to nor falsified the above written."
-- Gervase of Canterbury, *Chronicle*

So what did those five (or more) men see on June 18, 1178, in the sky above Canterbury? It almost certainly happened; Gervase is a careful reporter and his other two astronomical anomaly stories (an eclipse and a fireball) check out with other reports. Although there is some question about whether the Moon was actually visible on that Sunday (it was very close to new), a slip of one day makes it right again. The astronomer J.B. Hartung proposed that they had seen a very large meteor strike the Moon with overwhelming force, and proposed the very "young" crater Giordano Bruno as the impact site. (Later spectrometry studies make it seem like Bruno is still older than 800 years, sadly.) Another astronomer, Ken Brecher, identified the impact with Encke's Comet, part of what he dubbed the "Canterbury Swarm" of cometary bodies that may also have caused the [Tunguska blast](#) and a lunar earthquake in 1975, among other things. All three events happened in the last week of June -- in pre-Gregorian 1178, June 18 is actually June 25, of course -- indicating a regular periodicity. In his amiable way, Carl Sagan picked up on the story, and made it famous in astro-geek circles. Although astronomical fashion has moved on (the five may have seen a meteorite enter the atmosphere right in front of the lunar crescent), you can still see the "Canterbury Event" unquestioningly read as the birth pangs of Crater Bruno, a 100,000 megaton blast thrown up by a two-kilometer wide asteroid that fortunately missed the Earth.

"My great ancestor Genghis Khan saw a sign of change in the sky . . . and arose in the North."
-- from the annals of Kublai Khan

And perhaps, in an alternate history, it was an asteroid, and it *did* hit the Earth. If it missed the Moon right above Canterbury, the rock would plow into the North Atlantic Ocean, throwing up a 450-foot tsunami that would have scoured coastal Europe and the Middle East clean of human -- of all -- life. Perhaps a few peasants would have hung on in the Bavarian redoubt, and the Persian uplands would have broken the wave before it reached the Khwarizm Shah, but Christendom and Islam would be drowned and buried under miles of salt plains. Although the tsunami might not have propagated all the way to the Pacific, the giant years-long thundercloud of water vapor would have triggered a mega-La Niña to dwarf the imagination. The Song collapse in catastrophic blizzards, and the Minamoto ascendancy in Japan dries up with the rice fields. The only surviving cultures would be Tihuanaco in the Andes, the Ethiopian kingdoms, Tibet, and the Central Asian states, watered fitfully by glacial melting.

They might slowly save themselves, eking out a few paltry crops in five years of winter, suffering through famines and plagues and clouds of flies as entire ecosystems die off along the coasts. After two decades, they may have struggled back up to the skin of their teeth -- just in time for the Mongols to invade. Genghis Khan was 13 years old when the Flood hit, and the inland, desert-adapted, meat-eating Mongols would have suffered the least. But they would have suffered, and they would be starving for conquest and fresh fodder. The Mongols conquer everything in Eurasia not covered with salty, stinking mud, and with no Chinese civilization to tame them, they throw the last shards of art and culture on their dung fires and keep riding. Humanity starts over in a new Stone Age -- or a [new Ice Age](#), as the climate continues to cool. (This would be Reality Lucifer-7 in *GURPS Infinite Worlds.* Reality Lucifer-2, already in the book, is a landfall for a slightly smaller Canterbury Event.) If the meteor brings magic, the horrible yet clean slate would be suitable for ground-up *GURPS Fantasy* games, although I think this world could possibly be one where the primitive paranoia of *GURPS Fantasy II* looks realistic.

"But the Moon struggled in vain to free herself, and at length she fell forward, spent with the struggle, and the black

hood fell over her head again, and she had no strength to push it off. Then all the evil things came creeping back, and they laughed to think they had their enemy the Moon in their power at last."
-- Lincolnshire folk tale "The Dead Moon"

Of course, the previous scenario assumes that there aren't any species waiting to take over when mankind goes extinct. Perhaps the destruction of humanity leaves space for the return of the mermaids, elves, djinn, nats, and kami -- the shrews to mankind's dinosaurs. (Or perhaps our successors are Lovecraftian coleopterans.) Of course, the post-Fall environment will favor the corpse-eating, pale, unnatural fae more than the spirits of the drowned forests and mud-choked rivers. This **GURPS Faerie** setting can take on very strange coloration indeed, as the fundamentally uncreative fae attempt to reconstruct what they can of human society, based on their tricksy memories and the ruins they investigate. Drow and goblin PCs might hunt through long-dead cities like Delhi, Madrid, or Jerusalem, seeking priceless songs and carvings to keep themselves alive, but fearing the Hidden Races of Man who haunt the high mountain caves.

"Very calm and placid have become the raging billows,
That caused the total destruction of the Moa,
When the horns of the Moon fell from above down."
-- Maori poem

Interestingly, there's some slight evidence that not all the meteors, if meteors they were, *did* miss the Earth in our own history. Near Tapanui in southern New Zealand, there is a formation about 800 years old named Landslip Crater. Although that scar is probably a landslide and not a true crater, the region is thick with tektites, sarsens, quartz, and other high-impact heat-created rocks. The word "Tapanui" means, essentially, "the Dolorous Blow," and Maori legends say the whole area is where the Moa (a now-extinct flightless bird) died in a great fire. Could Tapanui have been a New Zealand Tunguska event, a bolide in the Canterbury Swarm that got past the Moon's defenses?

And what then? In yet another **GURPS Fantasy** sort of game, there's now a piece of Heaven lodged in the Antipodes, a sort of gigantic Grail rock exerting an ever-increasing force on the magically sensitive around the world. Perhaps Marco Polo accompanies Kublai Khan's expedition to the Source of Ch'i, in a southern sea roiling with dragons. Australia takes on a kind of Arabian Nights feel, as Chinese, Gujerati, Javanese, and Egyptian ships set up magical trading posts along the southeast coasts. Magi and merchants from Zimbabwe to Kyoto throng to the Long Jade Shadow, dickering for pieces of the Chintamani Stone and bathing themselves in the eerie auroras pouring up from the distant, hidden islands that have somehow become the true middle of the earth. Set the game two or three centuries later, as the Portuguese and Spanish galleons go in quest of the Stone From Heaven, or in the glorious Nineteenth Century, when British steam must battle the dragon magic of Great Peng-Lai for control of the South Seas.

"And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind."
-- Revelation 6:12-13

Another killjoy astronomer, one Paul Withers of the University of Arizona, points out that if a meteor did hit the Moon in 1178 and gouge out a crater the size of Bruno, it would have flung 10 million tons of ejecta toward the Earth, creating the greatest light show in the history of the world. And besides one possible Korean record, there isn't a single astronomical observation from the latter quarter of the twelfth century that mentions a major meteor shower, to say nothing of, oh, 50,000 shooting stars per hour for a week straight, which is what a Bruno impact would have spawned.

But if it did happen -- the moon turns red from the dust in the air, and the sun black likewise. The stars of heaven fall unto the Earth. Judgement Day, in other words. Some medieval theologians believed that while the worthy souls would be resurrected into the Empyrean Heaven, the unworthy hung around in the corrupt, dirty sublunar spheres. And those, it happens, are the ones who fall back to Earth in this **GURPS Y1.178K-Riverworld** setting. Perhaps the true saints (all 144,000 of them) have risen in the Rapture, leaving the Earth to the meek and the dead. 10 million tons, divided by, say, 138 pounds, means 144,444,444 human-sized lunar masses returning to Earth. (Which is nowhere near the number of dead by 1178, but one can't have everything.) Depending on the GM's proclivities, this can be a simple "Alexander

the Great and Genghis Khan duel for global dominion" game, complete with Famous Evil Dead Person cameos. (In such a game, the slow realization by the Church that perhaps it's not actually the End Times can be part of the drama.) Or it can be just the opening salvo in a full-fledged Apocalypse, as the other seals open and trumpets blow, ushering in four horsemen, giant armored locusts, and the Beast Apollyon.

"That night, too, there was another jetting out of gas from the distant planet. I saw it. A reddish flash at the edge, the slightest projection of the outline just as the chronometer struck midnight . . . Hundreds of observers saw the flame that night and the night after about midnight, and again the night after; and so for ten nights, a flame each night."
-- H.G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds*

Or, of course, the strange light on the moon's rim -- "repeated a dozen times or more" according to Gervase's eyewitness -- could have been mighty rockets or guns firing on the lunar surface. The explosions hurl a mighty armada of crystal and aluminum toward the warm, temptingly primitive, Earth. And where do the Lunites land? Do they take down the clearly most sophisticated civilization -- Song China and its neighbors -- first, and leave the rest of the world to native troops and Chinese governors? Do they land in mostly-unoccupied North America, perhaps ruling from the familiar deserts and craters of the Anasazi Southwest? Perhaps they don't bother to conquer anything else, and Columbus gets a real surprise when his ships pull up to feathery aluminum docks worked by copper-skinned slaves and insectile overseers. Do they bring high technology, lunar magic, or both to help them defeat their puny Earthbound foes? Can they defeat their puny Earthbound foes, or -- like the Martians and others -- have they desperately miscalculated? (This might make an interesting variant for GMs who have read *High Crusade* and want to turn medieval knights loose with Cavorite and death rays.) Whatever the answer, this **GURPS Middle Ages-Space** crossover is sure to spawn plenty of Canterbury tales.

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Review

Paths of the Damned: Ashes of Middenheim (for *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*)

Published by [Black Industries](#)

Developed by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by Graeme Davis

Cover by Christer Sveen

Illustrated by Tony Parker, Adrian Smith, & Christer Sveen

Cartography by Shawn Brown

96-page b&w hardcover; $24.99

Any new campaign for [***Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay***](#) has a near insurmountable problem to overcome. It must measure itself against one of the hobby's most highly regarded campaigns. Consisting of five parts, ***The Enemy Within Campaign*** takes the heroes from nowhere and draws them into an intrigue that threatens the future of the Empire, taking them up and down its rivers and canals, to Noble courts, and out of the Empire and back again, all in order to stop the threat. With its ripe mix of intrigue, conspiracy, Chaos cults, Cthulhu Mythos influences, bad puns (especially if you happen to be German or Swedish), and just plain good writing, ***The Enemy Within Campaign*** is really what *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* is remembered for.

Which is not to detract from the roleplaying game itself, for ***Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*** is a fine game, and even better and more playable in its second incarnation, designed by Green Ronin Publishing, as well as being one of 2005's top selling titles. ***Paths of the Damned: Ashes of Middenheim*** is the first part of an all-new campaign, a trilogy set after the events known as the Storm of Chaos. A Champion of Chaos, Archaon, Lord of the End Times, managed to unite the normally uncooperative forces of Chaos and lead a great army out of the Chaos Wastes of the far North. Rampaging through Kislev to the East, the horde smashed its way into the Empire and threatened the rest of the Old World. The campaign picks up mere days into the Empire's recovery following its hard won victories against Archaon.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

Ashes of Middenheim picks up from events depicted in "Through the Drakwald," the introductory adventure found in the back of the ***Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*** rulebook. Having escorted the refugees from the beleaguered village of Untergard to the City of Middenheim, the PCs have a second task to complete. This is to deliver a religious artefact: an icon of Sigmar, the founder of the Empire, and its most widely worshipped deity. For this, they each gain a small purse and the city's Temple of Sigmar. Yet within an hour of delivering the icon, the characters are up before the City Watch, suspected of having murdered the very priest they handed the icon to!

Almost a typical start for a ***Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*** game, then? Well, yes, and it quickly goes downhill from there. Thankfully cleared of murder, the characters are co-opted to work for the City Watch, which is otherwise occupied in keeping the peace in a city that has just endured a 15-day siege at the hands of a Chaos army and is busy

dealing with a big refugee problem. They are asked to investigate not only the priest's death, but also those of a watchman at the Collegium Theologica and a Dwarven doorkeeper. This is only the first of several tasks that the party is asked to undertake. These will take the characters into the tunnels under the city to face cultists and Skaven, deep into the Drakwald forest to retrieve an important Chaos artefact, combat an outbreak of spontaneous mutations, play an important role in a witch trial, and of course, unmask the villain behind it all. At the heart of this first part of **Paths of the Damned** is its McGuffin, the icon of Sigmar.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Designed for a minimum of four players (four pre-generated characters are included), **Ashes of Middenheim** can be played with nothing more than the core rulebook, although the **Old World Bestiary** might prove useful. The campaign is divided into eight easy-to-run chapters, each of which should last no longer than a session or two. Well presented in the usual style for the line with a range of good artwork, the only let down is the book's maps. All of these are a little crude in comparison with previous books for the line. Before it gets down to the actual adventure, **Ashes of Middenheim** includes "After the Storm," a good introduction to -- and overview of -- Middenheim, which serves both the long-time fan and the new one. Certainly the former, possible owners of **City of the White Wolf** (the supplement that *fully* detailed Middenheim) will appreciate the update of the city's situation in the wake of the Storm of Chaos. Notes here and there also update Middenheim from events that took place in **Power Behind the Throne,** the third part of **The Enemy Within Campaign.**

As to the writing, it certainly lacks the silly punning of previous books. This is not to say that the book is devoid of humor, for there are some nice touches of it here and there. A favourite comes following an aborted witch trial: "I promised the kids there'd be a burnin'!" The plotting though, feels heavy handed, and it suffers also from having the characters traipsing hither and thither, doing this and that, almost as if they are peripheral to events within the city, and relies all too often on combat for its resolution.

Overall, if there is an emphasis in this first part of the **Paths of the Damned** trilogy, it is on combat. This is not to say that the book lacks opportunity for either roleplaying or investigation -- *both* are present. There is even a chance for the players to roleplay the aforementioned witch trial, and they even receive experience points for doing so. Certainly, the characters should come away from this first part with Experience Points enough for four or five advances in terms of skills, talents, and attributes. They should also realise that the Empire is once again threatened from within.

In revisiting Middenheim, Graeme Davis delves into themes traditional to **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay** -- chaos, cults, conspiracies, religious strife, and rivalries -- and all kept as grim and perilous as you would expect. In many ways, this is a sequel to **Power Behind The Throne** and that is no bad thing. Unfortunately, **Ashes of Middenheim** is not on a par with that part of **The Enemy Within Campaign,** or indeed with any part of that campaign . . . nor can it be, for it lacks the depth, complexity, and grandeur of that campaign. Nonetheless, **Ashes of Middenheim** is not unplayable, but it is not vintage **Warhammer.** It is at best an introduction to the complexities of the setting that should ensure that the game's new players would return for the next part of the trilogy.

--Matthew Pook

An Amazing Array of Alternatives

I was planning on writing a series of columns about the three tiers of the gaming biz -- publisher, distributor, and retailer -- when I realized that 1) I don't have that much interesting to say on each (certainly not 1,000 words apiece), and 2) I wasn't sure how much of an audience there'd be for three such columns. Now, while astute long-time readers may question why I'm bothered by concerns such as having something interesting to say or my audience caring now, that's another issue.

(Before we continue, I should give the 50-word-or-less overview of the supply chain, for those who may not be familiar. Publishers create the products, distributors order the products from the publisher, and retailers order from distributors.)

Now, in trying to think of things to talk about for those three columns, I realized that all three tiers have something in common. Not only do all three have more competition than ever before; there are also more *alternatives* than ever before.

I consider competition to be the presentation of choices that exist in more or less the same form as current choices. For example, when two game shops open across town from each other, they're in competition. However, alternatives are choices that exist in a different form; for example, if I buy books from Amazon.com instead of my local book store, that's an alternative.

I think the distinction is important, because it might explain some of the difficulties the industry has had in recent years. Most businesses know how to deal with competition; try to do the same thing as your competitors, only better in some fashion. Thus if one game shop offers 10% off, another in town might offer 15% off, or a buy-four-get-one-free deal. If one distributor offers shipping within 48 hours, another might offer shipping within 24 hours or set up more warehouses (which results in faster ship times for retailers).

But alternatives are more troublesome for the established system, because it's difficult to necessarily see how, exactly, they compete . . . and what you can do about it. For example, if a store is only offering their wares in electronic format (via e23 or RPGnow), are they directly competing? What about the publisher who sells exclusive product via mail order to customers? And so on.

In addition, alternatives are often difficult to compete against even when they are recognized, because the fact that alternatives do things fundamentally differently often means they have advantages that the established mediums don't. For example, the success of the Wal-Mart chain was largely tied to the notion of selling lots of things in one location for cheaper than anyone else (using bulk buying power to drive prices down). In this case, a mom-and-pop game shop might know how it would have to compete against the big retailer, but it simply can't afford to:

"Okay; you want to buy the newest *Axis & Allies* game from us, and have us match the big box retailer price? <sigh> That'll be $9.98."
"Wow! For the whole game?!"
"No . . . to bribe me not to kick your pasty posterior."

As a quick list, then, here are some of the alternatives that exist on all three levels (not exhaustive, but more a top-of-my-head accounting):

Retail

- Online retailers (such as Amazon)
- Sales at conventions
- Electronic distribution methods (such as RPGnow, e23)
- Publishers selling direct to customers (which combines the two options above)
- Big box retailers

- Used markets (especially eBay)
- Piracy, especially online (it's hard to beat the price of free, when the only cost is your soul)

Distributors

- Publishers selling direct to retailers
- Big box retailers (since these exist as their own "distribution" chain, the very fact that these giants order 100,000 copies of Game X will eat up a lot of retail demand and flexibility you have when you go to place your 5,000-copy order)
- Electronic distribution methods

Publishers

- Print-on-demand outfits (such as Lightning Source)
- Electronic distribution methods
- Free publication (such as the Forge)

Now, I could complicate the matter by noting that there are more and stronger competitions for people's time now than any periods previously (such as *Worlds of Warcraft* or any of the next-gen console offerings, as well as a jillion other competing entertainment options), but that would just confuse the issue.

Now, in looking over the list, I note that almost all of the items on there weren't applicable a decade ago, and only a couple of them had any importance even five years ago. Thanks to the Internet, a customer who wants something new that he would have bought from a retailer in 1996 could possibly buy it from Amazon, RPGnow, eBay, or a publisher's website -- all of which sidestep the conventional retailer. Likewise someone interested in publishing his new game who would have submitted it to a game company for consideration (or formed their own company, at no small expense) could now publish it himself via RPGnow or Lightning Source, or offer it up as a freebee that anyone from around the world could find.

As such, I posit that the gaming industry (such as it is) faces a monumental assault on "business as usual." Whether this is a good thing depends on your world view. If you're a consumer, you have more options for getting more and different products in new forms, all at prices that are amazingly competitive. If you're a game shop, you've got more assaults on your mortgage than ever before. If you're a new publisher (or would-be publisher), you've got more avenues to get your product out; if you're an existing publisher, you've got more people looking to usurp your throne.

Even the humble publication you read now chose an alternative route; many moons ago we realized the rules were much less favorable for us to compete as a paper publication, so we fled your Friendly Local Game Stores for the new-ish frontiers of the Internet. Today, we face all manner of alternatives in varying media, from snazzy full-color offerings from Paizo Publishing to electronic offerings from other fields to fan-produced material for many game systems that equals or surpasses some commercial offerings.

What does the future hold? Darned if I know. But regardless of anything else, the world of games is a wholly different universe than when many of us started gaming decades ago. There are more alternatives now than ever before . . . and, I predict, not all these alternatives will make it into the next couple of decades in the form we know them now.

--Steven Marsh

The Thief-King's Regalia

by James L. Cambias

For centuries, professional crooks have secretly honored one of their number as the greatest living criminal -- the Thief-King. The badge of that position is a four-inch disk of gold-plated brass ornamented with a large glass gem. It hangs on a cord made from a hangman's noose.

It was made long ago, possibly in ancient Egypt or Mesopotamia. A great king owned a fabulous gem which was kept in a hidden treasure vault, protected by traps, locks, armed guards, and ferocious beasts. Nevertheless, the most daring thief of the age managed to fight, trick, and sneak his way into the heart of the vault, where he discovered that the king's famous gem was a fake -- sold years before to cover the royal expenses.

Thereafter the thief proudly wore the false jewel as a trophy, and all the other criminals in the land acclaimed him as King of Thieves. The title stuck until an up-and-coming rogue decided to top the exploit by stealing the fake gem. When the theft was discovered, the original King promptly announced that whoever had stolen it was his true and rightful successor. (He then retired to a country villa where he lived for many years off his accumulated loot.)

Since then the pendant has passed from one master thief to another, always by theft. Whoever has it is by right the Thief-King. Some Kings are experts at stealth and infiltration, who steal it from the neck of the wearer as he sleeps. Others are lockpicking and trap specialists who lift it from the most secure vaults. A few have been bloody-handed killers who have taken it by force. Once or twice it has even been acquired by fraud.

The Thief-King's Regalia is both a socially significant item and a magical one.

Its social powers are extensive. The Thief-King automatically gains the respect of all professional thieves. He is a full member of any Thieves' Guild organization, and most guilds grant the King of Thieves automatic Master status. He can easily attract followers and apprentices -- indeed it is almost impossible for the Thief-King to avoid them.

The King of Thieves also gains some automatic enemies. Most rulers and lawmen would love to have the prestige of capturing the Thief-King. It has happened a couple of times, but the King has always escaped justice.

The magical powers of the Regalia are not the work of any specific enchantment. Rather, they are simply the result of the pendant being worn and stolen repeatedly by the greatest thieves of the past few centuries. This means they cannot easily be removed.

Any professional thief wearing the pendant becomes more adept at all thieving skills. The strong personalities of its wearers have left their mark on the pendant. Anyone wearing it gradually becomes increasingly corrupt and greedy. However, being King of Thieves does give one a certain self-confidence, so that wearers are also much more resistant to both mundane intimidation and magical mind control.

In settings which include an actual God of Thieves (like Mercury or Olidammara), the pendant is likely to have gained a certain amount of holiness just from its age and associations. If that is the case, then clerical magic cast by priests of the God of Thieves would certainly be boosted by the presence of the pendant.

Game Effects

d20 System

Leadership: The pendant automatically grants any Rogue who owns it the Leadership feat. Moreover, the number and level of his followers is calculated as if his Charisma were 2 ranks higher than it actually is. If the character has already taken Leadership, recalculate the number and level of followers using the new Charisma score. Followers

gained with the Regalia are all Rogues or Clerics of thief gods.

Skill Bonus: +2 bonus to all Rogue class skills.

Alignment Shift: The wearer immediately loses the Lawful alignment. Each month the Regalia remains in his possession the character must make a Will save. If the roll fails a Good character becomes Neutral and a Neutral character becomes Evil. The change is permanent and cannot be reversed while the character owns the pendant. If it has been stolen from him, the character can regain his old alignment, either by means of a Remove Curse spell or the favor of the gods.

Will: +2 to Will saves when resisting Intimidation or Mind Control attempts. Note that this bonus does not help the character when rolling against the alignment shifting powers noted above.

Clerical Bonus: Clerics of Olidammara or other thief gods gain one extra Trickery Domain spell per caster level.

Innate Magic: The effects of the Regalia are not affected by Dispel Magic, Remove Curse, or other spells, except as noted above. It can only lose its powers by being destroyed. Unlike other artifacts or relics, the Regalia can be destroyed by mundane means (a hammer would do it), but whoever destroys it gains the permanent hatred of all Rogues. This isn't a magical curse but a real (and justifiable) dislike of someone who has dishonored their chosen profession.

GURPS Fourth Edition

Reputation: The pendant grants the King of Thieves a +4 Reputation among professional thieves (and a -4 among law-enforcement officials). He also has at least 4 levels of Administrative Rank in any organization of thieves.

Thieving Talent: Whoever possesses the pendant gets a +2 bonus to any skill he uses in the course of planning or conducting a theft or robbery.

Personality Change: If the character had the Honesty disadvantage he loses it. Characters who are not Honest automatically gain the Greed disadvantage.

Confidence: The King of Thieves gains an effective +2 to Will when resisting Intimidation attempts or mind control. This is not a magical power or an improvement in the character's actual Willpower, merely a situational bonus to reflect the confidence boost of being King of Thieves.

Magical Power: The pendant acts as a 20-point single-college Powerstone for spells in the Movement college. (If using the *GURPS Cabal* magic system, the pendant is imbued with the energies of the decan Anatreth and so also provides a +1 skill bonus to Movement college spells.)

Adventure Hooks

The most obvious adventure hook, especially for high-powered characters, is for one of the party to attempt to win the position of King of Thieves by stealing it. Finding who has it, determining where and how it is hidden, and doing the job would be a whole mini-campaign. And once a character has it, keeping it can provide nearly endless adventure opportunities.

Another possibility is for adventurers to come across the pendant on the corpse of the previous King, slain by some dreadful monster. The characters might not realize what they've acquired, leading to all sorts of mistaken identity problems and attempts at theft once they return it to civilization.

The pendant as written assumes a genre-fantasy setting, either in Earth's past or another world where thieves' guilds and tomb-looting adventurers are common. In a modern-day setting, the pendant's powers would be known only to a tiny handful of old, traditionalist criminal conspiracies. To balance its lack of social effects, the GM may wish to

increase its magical power -- perhaps the owner is simply always successful at robberies and thefts. Such a power would make it vastly attractive to criminals, intelligence agencies, and Illuminated conspiracies. A character might well come into possession of it by happenstance, then be foreced to cope with sinister forces trying to steal it away.

Being Better at Being Bad

Modeling Villains Who Aren't Morons

by Patrick Dunn

I was going to write this article yesterday after work, but I forgot to disengage the trap on my front door, so I fell into a pit and had to pacify the Balrog (who, by the way, is expensive to feed -- you have no idea). After crawling out of the pit, I found that a group of heroes had pillaged my living room and taken my computer and all my magic scrolls, not to mention my wand which I kept on a special stand in the middle of the room. It was a hectic day.

Okay, really I'm not an evil sorcerer and neither, I hope, are you. But if you're going to roleplay a fantasy villain (or, for that matter, a science fiction or contemporary villain) you've got to learn to think like one.

Fortunately, there isn't a school for villains, which might explain why so many roleplaying villains come off as -- excuse me -- a bit ineffective. But literature and history can teach us a lot about being bad, and the worse your villains, the better the game.

What do we learn from literature and history?

- **Villains are often appealing.** Dracula is sexy. Hitler was a great public speaker. Villains are really good at deception. They do this chiefly by offering something that people want -- in Dracula's case, it was money (to his solicitor) and sex (to Mina). For Hitler, it was economic stability and a scapegoat. Your villain might offer the players something they really want and would find hard to refuse, not as a bribe, but as a gift. The villains might even seem good and honorable, which brings me to my second point:
- **Villains are sometimes honorable (in that they keep their word), and they always think that they're doing the right thing.** Dracula's real-life inspiration was Vlad Dracul, called "The Impaler." He's still a cultural hero in his native Transylvania. In his mind, he was mounting enemies on stakes in order to defend the one true faith from foreign encroachment, and his people from slavery. Rasputin, who accidently brought down the Romanov dynasty and led to the Bolshevik revolution by associating the Czarina with sexual immorality, considered himself a holy man. Villains sleep really well at night.
- **If you must have a villain who knows he's evil (perhaps your game system demands it), then you might want to play up the pity factor.** Look at Hannibal Lector -- he knows eating people is wrong, but he just can't help it. They're so . . . delicious. You almost end up liking the fellow -- and what does that say about us? The fun in those books and movies is the creepiness of identifying with a cannibal. Let your players identify with the villains they're trying to destroy. Even Grendel in *Beowulf* is pitiful -- the poor fellow just can't sleep with all that noise at Heorot, and moreover, God hates him. What's he gonna do?
- **Villains make plans, and are flexible and intelligent.** See Shakespeare's Richard III. What a perfect villain -- twisted in body and mind, but with plans inside plans. And when something goes wrong, he shifts around his plans and tries to work around obstacles. It doesn't always work, but that's what heroes are for.
- **Villains, like heroes, have a fatal weakness.** Sticking with Shakespeare, the weakness of Macbeth is his overconfidence -- surely, he thinks, I can't die until the forest comes to my front door and -- what's that? Oak trees knocking? Sauron's weakness in the *Lord of the Rings* is really bad help -- he just can't find a hireling whom he can rely on. He's not stupid -- his employees are (except for Saruman who conveniently forgets that Ents exist despite his having written a paper on them in graduate school).
- **Finally, villains are not omniscient.** There are things they just do not know -- like the players' plans! That's important to keep in mind, because you, as GM, probably do know their plans. So you need to keep your mind compartmentalized. When Van Helsing explains Dracula's weaknesses -- that he's a childish creature driven by basic drives instead of superior reasoning -- to the others, Dracula doesn't overhear him. Otherwise, he might have tried to get a ghoul who would figure out something more than how to best prepare raw spider canapes. Still, villains also are not idiots. Hamlet's uncle knows Hamlet is going to kill him, so he does his best to get rid

of him, not because he's overheard Hamlet's plans (although in some productions of this play he does -- bad, bad interpretation!), but because he's a bright guy and he figures, if I were in Ham's place, I'd kill me too.

Being a good villain comes down to two basic principles, in the final analysis:

1. **Villains are complex** -- they're evil but think they're doing good, or they're totally depraved but feel guilty, or they're monsters who deserve pity.
2. **Villains are usually not stupid** -- they know their weaknesses (although maybe not all of them), and they know the heroes' strengths (although maybe not specifics), and they plan with those things in mind.

By far, the best way to learn to be evil is to read books and watch movies about effectively evil people. Here's a short chronological list to get you started:

- Haney, Seamus, tr. *Beowulf.* Grendel is a monster who, cursed by God, must live with his mother because he can't find a job. Meanwhile, some people build a tavern nearby and keep him up at all hours. He has the perfectly reasonable reaction of going there and eating some of them until Beowulf comes along and kills him and his mom. At the end of the poem, there's a dragon, for no discernable reason I've ever been able to figure out. Still, a great read. I recommend the Seamus Haney translation as accurate and easy to read (the original is in Old English).
- Milton. *Paradise Lost.* Satan, the most interesting villain of all time. A complex character who finds himself torn between his love for God and his love for -- well, himself. His plans are solid, and he succeeds temporarily, but God has this whole control-of-everything thing, and wins in the end.
- Shakespeare, William. *Richard III.* My favorite of all villains. Richard III is an ugly twisted monster of a man who nonetheless succeeds at wooing the widow of a good man on the night of his funeral, and then taking over a kingdom by being really sort of pleasant around everyone. At the end, undone by a missing horse. Historically, the real Richard III wasn't that bad, by the way.
- Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet.* Hamlet's uncle is an interestingly complex villain. He feels tremendous guilt for killing Hamlet's father -- in fact, that's his weakness. His guilt gives him away and he slides deeper into sin by trying to off Hamlet. He succeeds in messing everything up quite nicely in the end by killing Hamlet, his own wife, Hamlet's fiance's brother, Hamlet's fiancé (indirectly), and a few other random people here and there. Hamlet's body count is lower -- he manages to kill his evil uncle and accidently the uncle's chief advisor. If you want to see it movie form, I recommend the 1990 Franco Zeffirelli version with Mel Gibson.
- Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth.* This one's a bonus for having two great villains: Macbeth and his vicious wife. Their flaw is ambition and the need to cover up their crime by committing more crimes. Macbeth himself is cursed by a prophesy that convinces him, incorrectly, that he can't be killed.
- Stoker, Bram. *Dracula.* Regarded mostly as fluff when it was written, this book is now a classic text on what supernatural evil looks like, especially to a Victorian. What it looks like is a creature of passion who uses sex, greed, and other human drives to get his own way.
- Tolkien, J. R. R. *Lord of the Rings.* If you haven't read this already, you're probably reading the wrong magazine, but I've got to list it. Actually, Sauron isn't much of a villain -- he makes lots of mistakes, among them putting all his power in something he's just going to lose and trusting Saruman as an ally. The Peter Jackson movie version is fairly true to the books, although he makes some pacing decisions and cuts to fit it in three movies.
- *Silence of the Lambs.* A 1991 movie based on a series of books by Thomas Harris about Hannibal Lector, a cannibal with remarkable culinary skill and an advanced degree in psychology. Hannibal isn't the focus in this movie, but you get two different views of evil and both are somewhat pitiable.

Lens-Men

More Mini-Character Lenses for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Stephen Dedman

As a sequel to Eric B. Smith's article "[Mini-Character Lenses for **GURPS**](...)," here are some more 10-point mini-character lenses to help flesh out a character, giving the character knowledge in an area of expertise that might not be expected in his current career. Some are based on college courses, some on hobbies, some on casual jobs, and they can also be used for quickly generating NPCs for a particular role.

These lenses work particularly well when combined with character templates from the various **GURPS** books, allowing characters to fill niches outside of the primary one the template is designed for. You could also create a smaller version of most of these templates for just 5 points simply by cutting the points in the listed skills in half.

Acolyte

You are well-versed in the teachings of a particular religion, whether or not you still believe or practice. You may be able to quote scripture and perform rituals (or at least fake them convincingly), and claim some "benefits of clergy," such as the option of being tried by an ecclesiastical court instead of a secular one. You may not be able to legally marry people, but those for whom you give the last rites usually remain dead.

This is an appropriate set of skills for a seminary student, altar boy, lay preacher, chaplain's assistant, cultist, etc., and possibly useful for a monster hunter or confidence trickster.

Skills: Religious Ritual (chosen religion) (H) IQ+1 [8], Theology (chosen religion) (H) IQ-1 [2]. Exorcism, if allowed, is at IQ-2 [0]; Ritual Magic at IQ-5 [0].

Actor

You trod your hour upon the stage at some time, whether in a drama school, theater, movie, or TV studio, or ultra-tech equivalent.

Skills: Acting (A) IQ+1 [4], Performance (A) IQ+1 [4], and two points from Dancing (A) DX-1 [1], Literature (H) IQ-2 [1], Make-Up (E) IQ [1], Stage Combat (A) DX-1 [1], Sex Appeal (A) HT-1 [1], and Singing (E) HT [1].

A 10-point lens for a less talented but equally bankable thespian would be Attractive Appearance [5], with Performance (A) IQ [2], Sex Appeal (A) HT [2], and Acting (A) IQ-1 [1].

Athlete

You've had some training in at least one sport or athletic event, and even if you're no longer at the top of your form, you've tried to keep in shape. Some athletic skills may be of obvious use in combat situations, others are useful for avoiding combat.

Advantages: Fit [5] or one level in Basic Speed [5] or Basic Move [5].

Primary Skill: Pick one from: Acrobatics (H) DX [4], Bicycling (E) DX+2 [4], Bow (A) DX+1 [4], Boxing (A) DX+1 [4], Guns/TL (Pistol, Rifle or Shotgun) (E) DX+2 [4], Judo (H) DX [4], Jumping (E) DX+2 [4], Karate (H) DX [4], Lifting (A) HT+1 [4], Melee Weapon (Rapier) (A) DX+1 [4], Riding (A) DX+1 [4], Running (A) HT+1 [4],

Skating (A) HT+1 [4], Skiing (A) HT+1 [4], Sports (A) DX+1 [4], Sumo Wrestling (A) DX+1 [4], Swimming (E) HT+2 [4], Throwing (A) DX+1 [4], or Wrestling (A) DX+1 [4].

Secondary Skills: Pick one from Current Affairs (Sport) (E) IQ [1], First Aid/TL (E) IQ [1], Running (A) HT-1 [1], Swimming (E) HT [1], or Throwing (A) DX-1 [1].

Bar staff

You've worked in a saloon -- as a waiter, bouncer, or mixologist. The blend of skills needed for this job vary slightly according to the time, place and clientele, but some are universal.

Skills: For a bartender or tavern-keeper in almost any era, take Professional Skill: Bartender (A) IQ+1 [4], Diplomacy (H) IQ-1 [2], and two from Current Affairs/TL (E) IQ+1 [2], Merchant (A) IQ [2], Observation (A) Per [2], Savoir-Faire (E) IQ+1 [2], Sex Appeal (A) HT [2], and Streetwise (A) IQ [2]. For a bouncer, take Intimidation (A) IQ+1 [4], Diplomacy (H) IQ-2 [1], Observation (A) Per-1 [1], and 4 points in a combat skill appropriate to the time and place.

Conjurer

You've studied stage magic, and may even be able to fool people into thinking it's real magic. Even if that fails, you may be able to entertain a crowd -- and possibly distract them while the pickpockets go to work.

Skills: Performance (A) IQ [2], Sleight of Hand (H) DX [4], and one from

Escape (H) DX [4], Fire-Eating (A) DX+1 [4], Fortune-Telling (A) IQ+1 [4], Hypnotism (H) DX [4], and Ventriloquism (H) IQ [4].

Cowhand

You have some experience with handling animals on a ranch, usually horses and cattle, though similar skills would also be useful for a jackaroo on an Australian sheep station, or an offworld colonist herding vrang beasts.

Skills: Animal Handling (Cattle) (A) IQ+1 [4]; one of Driving/TL (Off-road automobile or motorcycle) (A) DX+1 [4], Piloting (Helicopter, Light Airplane or Ultralight) (A) DX+1 [4], or Riding (Equine) (A) DX+1 [4]; and two from Beam Weapon/TL (Pistol or Rifle) (E) DX [1], Bolas (A) DX-1 [1], Guns/TL (Pistol, Rifle or Tangler) (E) DX [1], Heraldry (Brands) (A) IQ-1 [1], Lasso (A) DX-1 [1], Melee Weapon (Whip) (A) DX-1 [1], or Singing (E) HT [1].

Crewman

You've been a crew member on a large vessel (ocean-going or space-faring), and have learned skills in exotic locales as well as those required on board.

Skills: Crewman/TL (E) IQ+1 [2]; any two from Area Knowledge (E) IQ+1 [2], Boating/TL (A) DX [2], Climbing (A) DX [2], Computer Operation/TL (E) IQ+1 [2], Cooking (A) IQ [2], Electronics Operation/TL (A) IQ [2], Environment Suit/TL (A) DX [2], Free Fall (A) DX [2], Freight Handling (A) IQ [2], Gunner (A) DX [2], Housekeeping (E) IQ+1 [2], Knot-Tying (E) DX+1 [2], Mechanic (A) IQ [2], Swimming (E) DX+1 [2]; and 4 points on Cultural Familiarity or Languages.

Homeless

You've lived on the streets for a while, whether through poverty, curiosity, or a need to hide. You've learned to sleep rough and scavenge for food, and (if you're lucky) stay healthy and out of trouble.

Skills: Scrounging (E) Per+1 [2], Urban Survival (A) Per [2], and three from

Fast-Talk (A) IQ [2], Filch (A) IQ [2], Holdout (A) IQ [2], Panhandling (E) IQ+1 [2], Stealth (A) IQ [2], and Streetwise (A) IQ [2].

Lab Assistant

You've worked as an assistant to a scientist (or alchemist), and know the basics of handling laboratory equipment, data recording and research procedure.

Skills: One from Alchemy/TL (VH) IQ-1 [4], Archaeology/TL (H) IQ [4], Astronomy/TL (H) IQ [4], Bioengineering/TL (H) IQ [4], Biology/TL (VH) IQ-1 [4], Chemistry/TL (H) IQ [4], Forensics/TL (H) IQ [4], Geology/TL (H) IQ [4], Herb Lore/TL (VH) IQ-1 [4], Metallurgy/TL (H) IQ [4], Paleontology/TL (H) IQ [4], Physics/TL (VH) IQ-1 [4], or Psychology/TL (Experimental) (H) IQ [4]; and three from Administration (A) IQ [2], Animal Handling (lab animals) (A) IQ [2], Computer Operation/TL (E) IQ+1 [2], Electronics Operation/TL (Scientific) (A) IQ [2], First Aid/TL (E) IQ+1 [2], Gardening (E) IQ+1 [2], Hazardous Materials/TL (A) IQ [2], NBC Suit/TL (A) DX [2], Housekeeping (E) IQ+1 [2], Photography/TL (A) IQ [2], Research (A) IQ [2], and Scrounging (E) IQ+1 [2].

Law Student

You're not licensed to practice law, but you've gained some knowledge of the system -- either in a law school, working for a law firm or court, or through less formal means (including as a defendant in court cases). You should be able to spot loopholes in a contract, tell when your rights have been infringed, or at least know you can and should call a real lawyer! This is a useful background for anyone working either side of the law, such as a private investigator or a confidence trickster, and would also be appropriate for a businessman or politician.

Skills: Law (H) IQ [4], and three from Administration (A) IQ [2], Criminology/TL (A) IQ [2], Diplomacy (H) IQ-1 [2], Fast-Talk (A) IQ [2], Research (A) IQ [2], and Savoir-Faire (E) IQ+1 [2].

Mule

You've smuggled contraband on your person, either voluntarily or involuntarily -- probably through Customs or past prison guards, though this skill set can also be useful for a pickpocket or shoplifter's accomplice.

Skills: Acting (A) IQ [2], Holdout (A) IQ+1 [4], Stealth (A) DX [2], Streetwise (A) IQ [2].

Prisoner

You've been confined in a jail, reform school, prisoner-of-war camp, gulag, or similar institution. Even if you were a model prisoner, you've learned some of the skills necessary to survive in this sort of regimented, boring, and possibly violent environment.

Skills: Acting (A) IQ-1 [1], Housekeeping, (E) IQ [1], and either Diplomacy (H) IQ-1 [2], Fast-Talk (A) IQ [2], or Intimidation (A) IQ [2]; and three from Armoury/TL (Melee Weapons) (A) IQ [2], Brawling (E) DX+1 [2], Carpentry (E) IQ+1 [2], Farming/TL (A) IQ [2], Gardening (E) IQ+1 [2], Holdout (A) IQ [2], Knife (E) DX+1 [2], Merchant (A) IQ [2], Observation (A) Per [2], Scrounging (E) IQ+1 [2], Sewing/TL (E) IQ+1 [2], Smuggling (A) IQ [2], Stealth (A) DX [2], and Streetwise (A) IQ [2].

Wheelman

You are proficient at driving cars and/or motorbikes and keeping them running, possibly in a high-speed pursuit. This mini-lens would be appropriate to a variety of automobile enthusiasts, with some optional skills suitable for car thieves, smugglers, outlaw bikers or beginning autoduellers, as well as for more law-abiding owner-operators.

Skills: Driving/TL (Automobile or motorcycle) (A) DX+1 [4], Mechanic/TL (Automobile or Motorcycle) (A) IQ+1 [4], and two from Area Knowledge (City or Nation) (E) IQ+1 [2], Armoury/TL (Vehicle Armor) (A) IQ-1 [1], Electrician/TL (A) IQ-1 [1], Electronics Operation/TL (Security) (A) IQ-1 [1], Freight Handling (A) IQ-1 [1], Lockpicking/TL (A) IQ-1 [1], Merchant (A) IQ-1 [1], Navigation (Land) (A) IQ-1 [1], Smuggling (A) IQ-1 [1].

Pyramid Review

Cartoon Action Hour Presents Metal Wars

Published by [Z-Man Games](#)

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Cover By Rain Beredo, Dennis Crisostomo, & Mico Suayan

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64-Page Saddlestitched B&W Book; $16.95

There are those that lament the fact that they cannot buy a *Transformers* RPG. Personally, this is not great loss as, (a) I am slightly too old to really appreciate the delights of the giant transforming robot cartoon; (b) I have grown sick of listening to conversations about it at work (but hey, I have since changed jobs and no longer have this problem); and finally, (c) I consider the *Transformers* as little more than a marketing exercise designed to sell plastic crud. Which in the sense of the latter, it is.

But then, what do you do if you want a GTR (or Giant Transforming Robot) RPG in the mode of the *Transformers?* Either design your own, or pick up a copy of ***Cartoon Action Hour: The 1980's Action Cartoon RPG,*** Spectrum Games' RPG of 80's Saturday morning cartoons, which lets you game in worlds and styles similar to that of *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe, G.I. Joe,* and *Transformers.* Pyjamas and sugar encrusted breakfast cereal all optional, of course. Yet that still leaves all the hard work to do, and thus makes ***Cartoon Action Hour Presents Metal Wars*** just what you want.

Subtitled a "Transbot Series Book," **Metal Wars** is the supplement that lets you do all the giant transforming robot action without infringing copyright. It is essentially a genre within a genre, giving a history to the creation and appearance of the Transbots as an intellectual property on television, in the cinema and in comic book form. It also describes the world and story of the Transbots as watched by their young audience on the television, in the movies and in the comics. Full guidelines are given for the players to build their own Giant Transforming Robot, along with the full statistics and write ups for all of the Transbots and their enemies, the Warbots, plus a scenario and GM advice on running a Giant Transforming Robot game.

Building a Giant Transforming Robot is slightly more complex than a normal **Cartoon Action Hour** character, as essentially a player is creating both a robot and whatever it transforms into, whether giant weapon, giant animal, or (indeed) giant tape recorder. Players receive either 100, 150, or 200 character points to spend on both, depending on whether he is creating a mini-bot, an action bot, or ultra bot, each a Transbot toy type. **Metal Wars** expands on the rules for robots possessing special abilities, which can be purchased for either of a Giant Transforming Robot's forms -- or more if they have three or more forms. It is also possible to build a gestalt robot, made up of several Giant Transforming Robots. Notes are also included for creating female robots, non-transforming robots, aliens, and human characters. Of course, if a player wants to leap into the game without messing around with all those points, he can just use the quick method also given, simply selecting in turn a package for his stats, his vehicle, and his special abilities.

As to the Transbots Universe, this is set back in 1984 with a President of the USA requesting America's scientists to design new revolutionary weapons systems. TechCorp, headed by Trevor Hastings, responded by creating the

Transbots, a new type of war machine. Just as he released the wave of machines, Hastings was ousted by Maximilian Mercy, his aim being to subvert the Transbot program and use them to take over America! In attempting to modify the first robot's programming, Mercy raised it to sentience, and thus Lightblade, the future leader of the heroic Transbots was born. The first wave of Transbots rebelled against Mercy's attempts to turn them to his evil plans and escaped, while the second wave, led by Vandal, now serve their master as the Warbots. The Transbots now work with Trevor Hastings to foil Mercy's dastardly plans.

Statistics, personalities, and story hooks (or disadvantages) are given for all of the Transbots and Warbots, along with their human compatriots. This includes Trevor and his son, plus a cute dragon-like companion from another dimension. While "Draggy" may not be appropriate to the genre, he represents the worst aspects of 80's cartoons.

The GM advice covers making the game lighter or darker, with more dramatic dialogue, less lethal plots, and more comedy for the former, and both tougher and more Warbots, more explicit violence, and even making Maximilian Mercy the president of the USA for the latter. The themes appropriate to a Giant Transforming Robot are neatly explored, primarily the sanctity of life and power and responsibility, as is a closer look at the giant robot genre. Both themes appear in the accompanying scenario "A New Threat," which also follows the basic plot lines for a Transbot story. These concentrate upon the Transbots putting a stop to the plans of Mercy and his Warbots, as they try to steal the energy they need, take over the USA, and sell the Transbot technology to foreign powers actively working to obtain this technology. All told, the adventure is nicely done.

In addition, *Metal Wars* details the Transbot comic book series, a far darker setting than the one portrayed in the cartoon. "War of the Transbots" is also deadlier and more serious, and its description includes an episode guide for the first season that can also double as adventure seeds.

Although no expert on the genre, *Metal Wars* seems certainly faithful to it. Further it seems to contain everything necessary to create a Transbot series of your own, if not a Giant Transforming Robot series of your own. Despite the fact that the book is well written and nicely illustrated, *Metal Wars* feels a little expensive considering its length. Yet if the *Transformers* and Giant Transforming Robots are your thing, then *Metal Wars* perfectly encapsulates everything you need to run a game within the genre. And if you can stamp out, blast, pulverise, snap, and otherwise wipe out of existence that irritating little Draggy, then it is thumbs up from me.

--Matthew Pook
(with thanks to Roj at Waylands Forge)

Pyramid Review

Mutants & Masterminds Second Edition Gamemaster's Screen

Published by [Green Ronin Games](#)

Designed by Steve Kenson

Illustrated by UDON with Chris Stevens

Graphic design by Hal Mangold

Four-panel, full-color, two-sided GM's reference sheet; $9.95

When the fiendish Dr. Rubicon unveils his latest plan for global domination, nothing on this Earth can stop him from his mad goal. On the other hand, without the proper references close by, his takeover can be an agonizingly slow process. Never fear, it's the *Mutants & Masterminds Second Edition Gamemaster's Screen* to the rescue.

As far as format, the "landscape" camp gains another convert; this product sits along its length at half-height so you can see the players who are (curses) foiling your plan once again. It's four panels, and the sides fold into the middle. The two end panels, it should be noted, aren't full-sized (presumably to allow folding and packaging it properly without gumming up the "spine"). They come in at three-quarters length, so you're getting just under 39 inches of shield. And it's been a while coming, but the swing has also started toward less content inside such packets. There are no adventures or small booklets with additional game material here (unless you count the sheet with the advertising blurb and OGL). What you do get is a lower cost.

One of the big snags to fast-paced adventures with the new version of *Mutants & Masterminds* is trying to find all the rules you need to run a fight (and locating skills isn't much more fun). The mechanics are spread all through the rulebook's combat chapter and then some, so super-speed gets the boost it needs from having everything concentrated on the two center panels. You get all the formulae for figuring your chances to hit and the modifiers to various forms of combat in smaller tables, but they all encircle the centerpiece: the Toughness Saving Throw Results grid. Here you'll find the outcome of all those damaging laser beams and ice bolts. It's gorgeous, and done, unlike many screens, in glorious full color.

The combat elements are part of a sweeping pattern. Instead of just finding a convenient nook to stick things to maximize space, you start with skills, systems, and interactions on the left, go through the fighting goodies, and end with helpful size and power progression tables to the right. You don't get all the skills, but the standouts are there: Search, Disable Device, Driving . . . the stuff you need to keep the campaign moving. On the other hand it adds lesser-used items like Craft and Repair, should you need to build a jet plane on a moment's notice and not wish to scour the rules.

The one real oversight -- and it's nothing major in the bigger picture -- is the condition summary. It has entangled and dazzled and some other important factors that impact your abilities, and it does have stunned (one of the conditions that result from getting jack-slapped by Madame Mysticism), but staggered and bruised (two other key pieces of the action rules) are both missing. This seems odd, having that spectacular color-coded chart with the results at the bottom, only to omit the actual mechanics of what that means in play.

The players have some material on their side for a change, and though it's not likely the carrying capacity tables (three of them) will benefit them often, the extra effort and Hero Points listings are invaluable if for no other reason than to
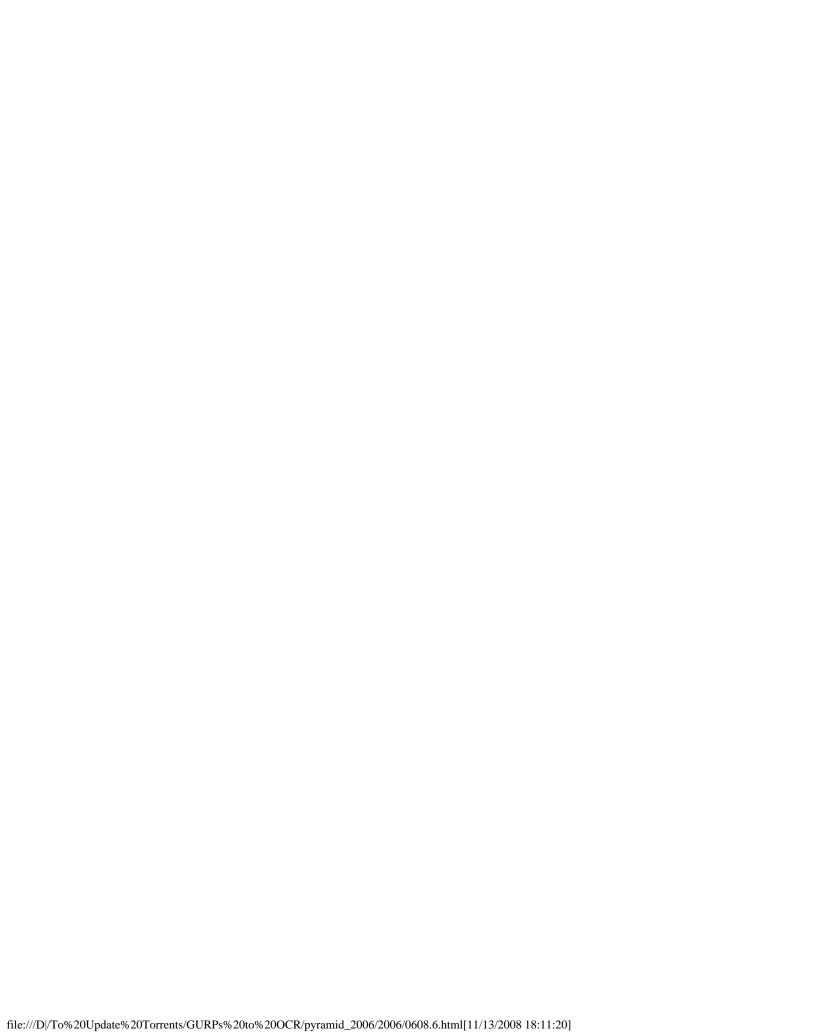
ride the GM about not giving them out enough.

The graphics and artwork on this screen may not set the standard, but they come close to the top spots. In the manner of Silver Age Sentinels, it uses a panoramic illustration of the game's iconic characters, good and evil, locked in battle. The picture is rather a shadowy one -- nicely done thematically, having the "dark" heroes and villains fighting on the "night" end of the screen, running to lighter personas at the twilit extreme -- but it's a shame to see some of these remarkable images bleeding together in the black. The structured tables inside aren't just laid out well . . . they're sharp, colorful, and obvious. It's more like a computer screen than a printed image, leaving little to trick or mislead the eye.

It's hard to really show off your creativity in a limited venue like a referee's shield -- it's more a necessity for most games than a blank canvas upon which to shine -- so seeing one done this well recalls the show biz axiom about "no small roles, only small actors." The ***Mutants & Masterminds Second Edition Gamemaster's Screen*** packs a lot of gaming goodness into a pretty flat package, and it's nice to see need met with quality.

--Andy Vetromile

Dork Tower!

Previous installments of the Brief History of Gaming series:

Pare It Down!

When I was a lad, playing computer games on my coal-powered Apple][gs, I used to play a *lot* of computer RPGs. Although most of these games didn't provide much of the tabletop-RPG experience -- at least, the RPG experience as I envisioned it and wanted it to be -- it was still as close as I could get, being a pre-adult sans car. And many games provided some aspects I liked about tabletop RPGs, such as exploration and freedom to wander; the more story-driven content and problem-solving desires I could get by playing my adventure games such as Infocom's wares. (And an offering like **Beyond Zork,** which tried to meld the two, was practically nirvana.)

Anyway, one aspect that was all too common for many computer RPGs was the need for inventory management . . . in particular when it came to food. Now, the curious thing is that, in most computer RPGs, you -- the player -- are the one who's supremely responsible for keeping track of *every* aspect of your party's supplies and provisions. This always struck me as odd, especially in games (such as the **Ultima** series) where you were playing one specific character, and the other members of your party were supposedly sentient beings with their own intellect, goals, and desires . . . including the important desire to remain alive.

As such, one of the most annoying common occurrences of many of these games was when we would all starve because we had run out of food. Sometimes this starvation was intentional (or, at least, unavoidable, such as when we ran out of money or were miles from the nearest town provisioner). But far too often it was entirely accidental; I simply hadn't noticed that we were getting low on food. Now, what I found interesting is that no one would speak up at any point and mention this fact until we were well and truly starving. And, despite assembling a ragtag team of supposedly sentient beings, none of them seemed to care much about their own survival, and I was generally unable to get their feedback or input: "Okay . . . we're about to take a tiny raft over the waterfall to the abyss, where the vessel will be presumably destroyed and we will be forced to wander around for months without any potential for contact with the world we have known. Is there *anything* any of you would like to mention before we get on that raft? Because, I'll be honest here: If one of you makes a peep that *remotely* sounds like, 'I'm hungry and we're out of food!' in the first hour of this expedition, I will personally slow-roast your corpse and feed it to the rest of the party. Capisci?"

Decades of experience have taught me that my computer-based anecdote was not an anomaly, nor limited to the world of electrons. For example, I remember one tale (I think it was from the , but I can't be certain, and I apologize for using the anecdote unattributed) about a standard fantasy-based RPG game. In this campaign, the GM inflicted damage on the PCs because they were starving, since the players had never mentioned they were eating . . . despite the fact that their characters had plenty of food. The players were -- justifiably, in my opinion -- upset, and so for the rest of the adventure they made sure to let the GM know periodically that their characters were eating; they also let him know that they were regularly going to the bathroom and passing gas, so that they wouldn't accidentally soil themselves or explode from the buildup of waste products.

I've been playing a computer game for a couple of weeks now (which will probably see a review here in the not too distant future) that I've been enjoying quite a bit. And one reason *why* I'm enjoying it is that I realize it's taken away a lot of the aspects I didn't enjoy about many computer RPGs: the need to worry about food, the need to stop playing (in game time) because it's gotten dark in the world and I either can't see anything or everyone is sleeping that I'd want to talk to (for example, to buy more food), the need to stock enough torches, and so on. And it's fun.

For a while, there was a trend (and might still be, for all I know) to make all manner of games more complex and "realistic." For example, the classic (read: "old") computer game *The Magic Candle* required the player to fix all weapons periodically (as in, "after every couple of battles"), or else they'd eventually break. A lot of smaller-press games from the 1980s and early 1990s seemed to think that crates of random tables was the route to realism, resulting in bar fights between two drunks taking three hours.

But how fun is it? Isn't it more fun to strip out all the unnecessary stuff, to play a game where bar fights take a few minutes, leaving more time for the good parts of the adventure (including, if desired, more drawn-out and complicated battles)? Is it better to make players constantly afraid that they'll lose their light source or have insufficient light,

coming up with exacting modifiers in every situation -- making sure proximity to torches, modifiers for infravision, etc. -- is accounted for? Or is it enough to just say, "It's gloomy in this cave" or "It's really dark; everyone's at a minus 1," or, when dramatically appropriate, to say, "It is pitch black. You are likely to be eaten by a grue"?

This is an appeal to all: Consider paring it down. Find out what makes the game "fun," and cut out as much as possible as you can. Yes, for different groups this may mean different things; for gamers who dislike socializing or roleplaying, maybe the PCs get an amulet that transports them from hotspot to hotspot, enabling them to dip right into the thick of battle. If the players hate the minutia of food, or encumbrance, or wounds, or healing times, or anything, consider how much of an impact it will make to just pitch it.

Because games, ultimately, do not exist for their own sake; they exist because it is fun for them to do so . . . fun for *us* to do so. And if a game has too many barnacles, sometimes cutting them off results in a faster, healthier experience. And if the barnacles can't be knocked off, maybe it's time to find a new ship.

--Steven Marsh

Building the Low-Tech Landscape

Part 1: Peasant Economics
for *GURPS*

by Matt Riggsby

If the PCs become rulers, or even low-level administrators like samurai landlords, feudal knights, or Viking chieftains, this responsibility brings a number of niggling questions: Just how many people does my character, the Duke of Earl, rule? On how much land? What do they do there? How far is it to the nearest town? How big is it? These are not easy questions.

For a start, our historical data on the subject is sparse and difficult. Demographics and agricultural data before the 19th century are just this side of historical fiction. Where we do have data, it's patchy and difficult to interpret. For example, the weight of a quarter of grain, a standard unit of measure for the Middle Ages, in the west of England in 1239 might be different from a quarter in the north of Spain in 1384 in ways we don't quite understand. Indeed, a quarter in one place might be different from the next county over in the same year.

Even with enough data about historical settings, it's a complex question for fantasy GMs. A great deal depends on variables about which the GM must make essentially arbitrary decisions, since historically they vary enormously through space and time, and no generalization is necessarily appropriate to all or even most historical periods, let alone any historically flavored fantasy world. What, exactly, is the level of agricultural technology? How good is the land? What's the climate like? Is it good land for pigs? Oats? Grape vines? How heavy are taxes, and how do they make their way to the nobility, the government, or the landlord? But for those with a desire to put some effort into setting up initial conditions, this article provides some guidelines for turning those Status 4 and Wealth (Wealthy) advantages into some number of peasants and some number of acres.

And this isn't just an exercise in accounting. In figuring out how many people make a living, the GM will coincidentally answer questions which will let her flesh out the landscape. Are people spread out across broad areas, or tightly packed in dense, closely placed villages? Will adventurers traveling through the countryside pass through dark forests, tromp across endless well-tilled fields, or trip over sheep? This article and its sequels will give you some plausible answers.

Procedure

In order to answer these questions, the GM (or the enthusiastic player who wants to map out his domain in excruciating detail) will need to make a number of decisions and, based on those, do some calculations to work through their ramifications. To figure out how much land peasants use and how they use it, follow the steps listed below. "Decide on" items require an arbitrary decision, such as how wealthy the local peasants are. "Determine" items require some decision making within bounds; for example, given the total value of animals the peasants own and a list of prices for individual animals, you'll have to determine how many of each type of animal is present. "Calculate" items are

pure math.

1. Decide on a number of households in the area and their wealth levels
2. (Optional) Decide on the total value of domestic animals. Animal usage is largely a function of wealth and, at these levels, provides a trivial portion of income. The GM may want to ignore steps related to animals and the income they provide unless use of animals is very heavy.
3. (Optional) Determine how many animals of which species are present
4. (Optional) Calculate income from animal consumption and secondary products.
5. (Optional) Decide on land requirements for animals
6. Decide on effective yields of the crops the peasants grow
7. Determine mix and proportions of crops grown
8. Calculate amount of farmland used
9. Decide on amount of wasteland used
10. Calculate total land usage

Once you've gone through these steps, you'll be able to discuss how many people there are in the area, how close together they live, how they effect the landscape, and so on. The math is simple, but there is a lot of it, so, like vehicle design, a spreadsheet might be a good idea.

Peasant Income and Households

It all starts with the peasants. Without them, everyone else starves. The majority of peasants in low-tech societies will be Poor or Struggling, with a corresponding Status of -2 or -1. There may be a few Dead Broke individuals, mostly elderly widows or widowers with no family to support them, and a minority of wealthier (Status 0/Average wealth) peasants who have, through cleverness and hard work, managed to achieve relative prosperity. The Dead Broke peasants are likely to be statistically insignificant in the long run (if they aren't, expect widespread famine), but the Average peasants form a growing minority as improving agricultural technology allows better yields on smaller plots of land.

Historical records have overwhelmingly identified households rather than individuals as the fundamental economic unit, and we'll be doing the same. As it happens, **GURPS** *Fourth Edition* supports this perspective for peasants. In "Supporting a Family," **GURPS Fantasy** makes the assumption that in a family, the husband has an income while the wife concerns herself with household matters. That's essentially true in most cases, but an oversimplification. In peasant societies, men, women, and children past infancy all perform both productive labor and household maintenance to some degree or another, often divided along gender and age lines. For example, men might plow the fields while women brew ale, tend chickens, and cultivate vegetable gardens for sale outside the household, while older children look after the swine and gather nuts and mushrooms in the woods. *Everyone* helps with the harvest and with other time-sensitive labor.

New World Crops

This article concentrates on crops available in the Old World, but we should at least mention some New World staples. Effective yields of maize are comparable to those of other high-quality grains, although they should be combined with legumes to provide complete proteins. Potatoes have far higher yields, up to twice as much as any grain at the TLs in question, and provide more vitamins, making it less important to consume other foods for complete nutrition. When introduced in Europe, though, they fetched very low prices.

But regardless of the relative amounts of productive labor different family members provide, we can accept the economic impact of the guideline: a small household has the equivalent of a single "job" worth of income and consumes the equivalent of a single monthly cost of living. Because men have overwhelmingly had ownership of land and other valuables (and have therefore been the primary influence on the family's future income), a family typically has the Wealth level of the husband, although the opposite can happen. For example, a poor nobleman could negotiate a large dowry from a social-climbing family of common merchants, and in an egalitarian fantasy society, a new family could have the wealth of the wife as easily as the husband.

The guideline that someone must have at least Struggling wealth in order to get married should only be observed where most people have Struggling wealth or better. People in extremely poor societies still get married and have children; they just postpone the expensive formalities as long as socially feasible, live shorter lives, have smaller families, and feel bad about not being able to afford a better match. Two Poor characters can support a family, but they must both work (giving the household two incomes), both consume a monthly cost of living, and they'll still be on the edge of starvation.

We'll be working with assumption that peasant households have an average of five people: two parents and three children, perhaps replacing a child with an older relative (for example, an elderly grandparent or an unmarried sibling of one of the parents). However, actual household size and composition varied across wealth levels and cultures. Richer families had more people, while poorer families couldn't afford too many more mouths to feed. Likewise, different cultural preferences and economic relationships could lead to several different incomes for people living in the same home. The GM can determine a ratio of Average to Struggling to Poor jobs' worth of income and, if desired, massage those numbers into larger or smaller physical households as appropriate to a society. For example, a Medieval English peasant might live in a small hut with his wife and children, while the contemporary head of a Viking family might live in the same house as married brothers and grown sons and their wives and children for a "household" of 15 or 20 people, and an earlier Roman villa would have a number of slaves living together in a single very large household.

Typical income for Struggling characters ranges from $325/month at TL 1 to $400/month at TL4, although *Fantasy* sets the income of a peasant farmer at $300, which happens to exactly match monthly cost of living for Status -1 characters. A Poor peasant might only make $100/month rather than the typical $130 to $160 per month for Poor characters. We'll accept that a relatively well-to-do (that is, Average wealth) farmer makes an appropriate income for his TL rather than the slightly depressed income of his poorer cousins.

It's also worth keeping in mind that peasant income comes on a seasonal, annual cycle. A very Poor peasant may make $1,200 through the course of the year, $1,680 for typically Poor peasant at TL3, $3600 for a bad-off Struggling peasant, and $4,200 for a typical Struggling peasant at TL3. Moreover, it doesn't come in even monthly installments. In most of the world, a peasant's "income" starts out fairly sparse in the spring as edible crops start to grow and animals recover from the winter, hits one or two peaks during major grain harvests (often one in summer and another in late fall or early winter), then drops to almost nothing during the winter months. In tropical regions, income variations will follow dry and rainy seasons. GMs absolutely gung-ho for realistic detail may want to adjust monthly peasant income accordingly.

Primary Crops

Although it's expressed in $ in the job descriptions, peasant income doesn't really come in the form of money. It comes in as agricultural produce, the vast majority of which is grain supplemented by small quantities of fruit, vegetables, dairy products, and other foods. A peasant needs to consume at least 600 pounds a year of some combination of grains. This is an appropriate level for Poor characters. It provides far less than the recommended caloric intake for an active adult, but peasants often suffer from inadequate nutrition. If there is any shortfall, starvation is almost certain, and even this level will likely lead to low HT and ST scores. 750 pounds of grain a year is closer to the minimum for a healthy diet; characters with Struggling wealth may consume this much. The excess, if there is any, can be sold for money. Of course, to engage in interesting trade, you'll need to know just what the peasants are growing.

When possible, farmers will concentrate on crops that will fetch a high price, but they'll have to balance that with the need to feed themselves. Wheat was and is the preferred crop in the west. It tastes better, is somewhat more nutritious by weight than most other grains, and can be converted into superior breads, noodles, and other forms. For large chunks of the Middle Ages, it commanded a price close to double that of cheaper grains. However, it is more susceptible to blights and requires more space and more extensively prepared land than other grains, so most peasants wouldn't be able to grow nearly as much of it as they'd like. Rice, the preferred grain in the east, has similarly preferred taste and versatility, but its cultivation faces obstacles of its own.

Consequently, the bulk of a peasant farmer's crops would be a less tasty but hardier or more prolific crop such as barley, rye, or millet. Despite inferior taste and versatility, they can grow on inferior land and in more demanding climates, and many varieties can be grown much more densely. For example, sown with enough seed, a plot of land could produce up to twice as much barley as it could wheat or rice. Oats deserve a special mention. The nutrition, taste, and versatility are generally inferior to wheat and yields are often even lower. Why grow them, then? First, oats grow reasonably well in cold, damp conditions and on less fertile soil, making them a viable crop for human consumption in environments where even barley doesn't grow particularly well. Second, human consumption aside, it became a vital crop for feeding horses.

Legumes of various kinds -- beans and peas -- were a fairly common secondary crop. They provided significant amounts of much-needed protein and, in some kinds of crop rotation, performed the useful office of partially regenerating the soil's nitrogen supply. Bean prices could vary considerably, but often fell into the range of lower-grade grains.

The chart below shows typical market prices and yields per acre of farmland for staple crops common in many historical and pseudo-historical settings:

Primary Crop Prices and Yields

Item	Price	Effective Annual Yields
Low-quality grains	$0.90/pound	200-1000 lb./acre
High-quality grains	$1.8/pound	115-600 lb./acre [1]
Oats	$1.1/pound	100-500 lb./acre
Peas, beans	$1.2/pound	200-600 lb./acre

1. Effective rice yields can jump as high as 1,000 pound per acre, although that requires wet-farming techniques which arguably become available only at TL4.

The effective yield is *not* the total amount of grain a field will produce. It's the amount the farmer can consume, sell, or pay in taxes after setting aside a portion to use for the next year's planting with allowances made for rot and other losses. The *actual* yield, which is relatively consistent across the TLs in question here, is 10-20% higher than the maximum effective yields given here. It appears that until important technological changes at the beginning of TL5, the effective yield is less dependent on technology and more on the climate, inherent qualities of the soil, and the amount of labor available to work the land. Farmers in sparsely populated Carolingian France (early TL3) often got under 250 lbs./acre of wheat, but those in densely packed Renaissance Europe (early TL4) could get up to 600 lbs./acre, as could those in Roman Africa (late TL2), all for about the same amount of seed grain.

> ### Example: $ to Goods
>
> Instead of saying that a peasant gets a $3,600 annual income, the GM may declare that he gets 4,000 pounds of barley, 2,000 pounds of wheat, or, more likely, a combination of crops: for example, 2,610 pounds of barley, 315 pounds of wheat, and 570 pounds of peas.

Secondary Crops

If at all possible, a peasant will want to produce more than just the bare minimum of subsistence crops, either for sale or to provide a more interesting and varied diet. These are a few of the more economically significant crops and goods which peasants might produce. Peasants may substitute grains with the foods in this section up to a third of the $ value of their monthly cost of living (except for beer; it can be assumed that those peasants who can are already converting some of their grain into beer, so the value to be applied against cost of living comes from their grain production).

Something just about every farmer can do is turn some of his grain into a weakly alcoholic, fermented beverage;

connoisseurs will object, but we'll call them all "beer." Beer-brewing in various forms is a nearly universal art, and with good reason. Apart from the obvious, if relatively mild, intoxicating properties, it preserves significant nutritive value and provides a relatively safe drink where water is microbially suspect. It appears that peasants in large sections of late Medieval Europe consumed it through the workday. Though barley was the most common grain for it, most grains and starchy tubers can be turned into beer with a successful Brewing roll; failure destroys the raw material.

Warmer, drier areas of the western world have two very important secondary crops: grapes and olives, used overwhelmingly to produce wine and oil rather than for their raw fruit. There have been times when they were even grown together, grape vines curling around olive trees.

Although olive trees produce a relatively large amount of fruit relative to grain fields in terms of raw weight, they don't provide much nutrition, and the fruit needs extensive processing. Although they can be preserved, they are more often pressed for oil, which can pack significant value into a small bottle. But even a little oil represents a lot of olives. It takes about five pounds of olives to make a pint of oil. One odd property of olive trees is that they have alternating harvests. That is, olive harvests tend strongly towards on and off years. If the crop was good this year, it's likely to be bad the next, and vice versa.

Grapes have a few things in common with olives. They can processed for long-term storage (that is, dried into raisins) but they are more often processed for the liquids they contain, the end result being wine. The yield is more favorable than for olive oil. It takes ten to twelve pounds of grapes to make a gallon of wine.

The major drawback with both olive trees and grape vines is that they take years to set up. Newly planted vines and olive trees don't produce for four to seven years after planting, and olive trees grown from seedlings rather than cuttings can take over a decade to bear fruit! Peasants can communally tend small vineyards and olive groves, but they don't have a great deal of spare labor to invest in such projects. Consequently, wine and olive production are the realm of villa owners, monasteries, noblemen, and others who can support themselves and direct spare labor to experiments and long-term tasks without fear of starvation. Once established, though, both vines and olives can produce fruit for decades with little tending. Some olive groves have been productive for *centuries.*

While important for a variety of nutrients, other fruits and vegetables don't provide nearly as many calories for the amount of work it takes to grow them as grain, and they have historically been far less significant both economically and in the diet. Squash varieties from zucchini to pumpkin, melons, cucumbers, apples, carrots, peaches, onions, garlic, berries, eggplants, mushrooms, turnips (with clover, these become an important part of TL5's agricultural revolution, but through TL4, one is likely to rely on turnips only in desperation or in Scotland), edible greens, herbs, and the like may, for economic purposes, be lumped together as a variety of other vegetable foods.

Secondary Crop Prices and Yields

Crop/Product	Cost	Yield
Olive oil	$20/pint	35-200 gallons/acre
Ale	$3-$8/gallon	1.1-1.5 lb. grain/gallon
Wine	$6-$30/gallon	30-60 gallons/acre
Other fruits and vegetables	$.10-$3/lb.	75-400 lb./acre
Preserved fruits and vegetables	$.50-$5/lb.	2-4 lb. of raw materials per pound of preserved

Livestock

In peasant societies, animals are kept primarily for secondary products (milk, eggs, fur, feathers, etc.) and labor, with meat a secondary concern, with high-litter, low-maintenance pigs as the most notable exception. How many a peasant or his village can keep depends in large part on how much the peasants can afford to feed them and how much spare land there is for pasturage.

Other Animals

The animals detailed here aren't

Therefore, just as income can be used as a determinant of whether or not a peasant can afford to get married, it can also be used to determine which animals he can keep. Just about anyone can keep one or two small household animals, but the larger the beast, the more expensive it is to keep. Very poor peasants simply don't have the land or spare grain to maintain large animals like horses and cows.

Meat may not have been a day-to-day part of the peasant diet, but it would have been eaten regularly at certain times and in small quantities throughout the year. Specifically, meat would have been eaten mostly during the late fall into winter. A peasant would have to decide whether he could feed both himself and his animals over the cold winter months. The ones not making the cut would end up on the dinner table. Some meat might have been eaten fresh, but where possible, it would be preserved by smoking, salting, and so on. Animals slaughtered would typically have been either very young (since they wouldn't provide as much productive labor or secondary products) or very old (and past their productive prime).

Since they're small, chickens and related fowl are the most common domestic animals, useful for feathers and eggs. Intensive poultry farming could theoretically have supported a huge number on an acre of land. However, birds are more likely to be found raised in small numbers in individual households, with each family owning a rooster and a few hens.

Sheep and goats are kept for milk and wool. Unlike chickens, who can live on forage from a garden and a few handfuls of additional grain, sheep and goats need hay or grain during the winter and pasturage when available. They are notoriously hard on grass and can strip the land of just about all vegetation (intensive grazing is one reason the Mediterranean is so rich in flavorful herbs, whose pungent essential oils make them the few plants sheep and goats won't eat), so farmers would move them around as frequently as possible. Depending on the breed, a sheep or wooly goat can produce anywhere from 2 to 20 pounds of raw wool a year, although that upper limit is for certain modern breeds.

Pigs are the only animal found in large numbers which neither work nor produce secondary products and so are raised solely for meat. However, they make up for it by being cheap to keep. Instead of requiring pasturage which might be tilled for more grain or grain itself, pigs can be fed on household scraps and forage in waste land.

Beyond sheep, goats, and pigs are animals large enough to provide useful labor: horses and cattle. Given a choice, peasants are more likely to take cattle than horses. Though they don't provide as much labor on a pound-per-pound basis, cattle can provide relatively ample quantities of milk and, once they die, meat and hides for leather. Many societies consume their blood, although only a few, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa, carefully bleed the cattle through their lives rather than exsanguinate them when they're slaughtered. Most of the actual work is done by oxen, which are castrated bulls.

the only domestic animals, but they are the preferred ones. Without a way to offset the cost of keeping them, most peasants simply couldn't afford animals. However, it's possible to introduce small numbers of other animals. For example, rabbits, guinea pigs, and other small, prolific mammals might be kept as a small-scale meat supply. The GM can treat such animals as costing as much as chickens, but without the egg supply. Likewise, doves, pigeons, and other small birds could be kept, but cost more ($7-10/bird) and produce inferior eggs (no more than $1/dozen).

Anyone living near water has the opportunity to catch fish, frogs, and other aquatic animals. A day's fishing in a pond or river can net $(margin of success on a Fishing roll/2) worth of fish. However, the best weather for sitting out and fishing is also during important seasons for farming, so a peasant is far better off in the long run working in the fields than sitting by the river.

Finally, there are dogs. Anyone involved in herding will have them as a matter of course, and regular hunters may have them as well. However, their need for meat makes them unlikely pets for poor peasants tilling the soil. A village with a significant number of animals may have a handful of dogs, but most dogs will be in the hands of the upper classes.

Horses aren't widely used for secondary products (in addition to being relatively poor milkers, their hair makes proverbially uncomfortable clothes), but they do provide useful labor. In fact, appropriate breeds of horses provide significantly more labor than oxen. They provide more useful hours of labor per day and, since they can move faster, can get more land plowed per hour. Unfortunately for peasants, horses also have more expensive tastes than oxen. Despite being of roughly comparable sizes, a horse cost about four times as much to feed. Oxen can get by on a lot of

hay and a little bit of grain (typically oats). For horses, the opposite was true. For antiquity and most of the Middle Ages, the additional productivity they might get out of a horse didn't justify the added cost of keeping a horse, but in the later Middle Ages, agricultural productivity reached a point where horses could become common farm animals.

A reasonable rule of thumb is an average of $5 worth of animal per Poor household, $100 worth of animal per Struggling household, and $500 worth of animal per Average household. In any given village, some people might have a few chickens, while others have a few sheep and still others a cow or two. The cost of caring for them is, like the cost of supporting a family, included in the cost of living. It's unlikely that peasant-owned animals will be more than 10% cattle and horses, nor are they likely to have more than two fowl per person (herd animals are much easier to keep in large numbers; a single family could easily take care of over 100 sheep if that were their full-time occupation). In addition to income from secondary products such as cheese and wool, a household can get 5% of the value of its animal holdings annually from selling new offspring or slaughtering and eating them, or 8% from pigs.

Animal And Animal Product Prices

Product/Animal	Price	Productivity/Land Requirement
Cheese	$2-$5/pound	1.25-1.75 gallons milk/lb. (goats produce 50-250 gallons/yr., cows produce 100-500 gallons/yr.)
Wool	$4-6/pound	2-20 lb./animal/yr.
Eggs	$2/dozen	3-10 doz./chicken/yr.
Fowl	$5	200/acre
Sheep, goat	$140	.5 to 10 acres each
Pig	$150	.25 to 5 acres each
Cow	$400	1 to 20 acres each

Though our primary focus here is soil-tilling peasants, it's worth noting conditions for nomadic herders. Full-time herders are likely to have animals on the upper end of the given productivity ranges. If a sheep only produces three or four pounds of wool a year, it would be impossible to keep track of enough of them to make wool production anything more than a sideline. However, for sheep and goats producing 10 pounds of wool a year or more, including income from cheese and wool, a reasonably-sized flock of 60 would be enough to support a Struggling shepherd and his family (and their relatively meat-heavy diet would support a dog or two to help out). It's a relatively inefficient use of land; at a relatively favorable 3 acres per sheep, that's 120 acres, as opposed to a mere 8.3 for the Struggling peasant in the Primary Crops example. However, the land on which sheep are grazed can be very poor indeed, so grazing animals can be a great way of making use of land that would otherwise provide few or no resources.

Land Use And Distribution

The amount of land farmers work depends on a great many factors: soil fertility, density of existing population, extent and distribution of arable land, and so on. Peasants can keep up to 12 acres per household under active cultivation. It's possible that widely available animal labor would enable peasants to cultivate even more, but impossible to say for sure; societies with enough animal resources to make a difference were already running out of arable land. To calculate the amount of land under cultivation, the GM must set an effective

Animals Example

Consider a village of 100 Struggling households. They have a total of $10,000 worth of animals. If they're members of a poultry-loving society, that could be 10,000 chickens. However, that's fairly unlikely. A more likely distribution might be 11 cows, 16 pigs, 12 sheep or goats, and 304 fowl. Assuming 5 acres of pasturage for each cow, 3 for sheep or goats, and .5 for pigs, the village requires 98.5 acres of pasturage to keep its animals. Assuming modest yields of cheese, wool, and eggs, the annual production of secondary products will be below the value of the animals themselves. If we were being insanely detailed, we might use the average animal-income to

yield for commodities listed in the crop and product tables above. Given that and the types of crops peasants are growing, the number of acres under cultivation can be computed.

But that's not all the land they need. Crop rotation ensures that there will be empty land along with land being farmed. At TL2 and most of TL1, every acre under cultivation will usually be matched by another acre lying fallow for the year (light grazing might be allowed on the fallow land, but heavy grazers like sheep and goats would be kept elsewhere). At TL3, only one acre needs to be set aside for every two acres being cultivated, and at TL4 only one fallow acre for every three being cultivated. If the society cultivates animals in significant numbers, they may need separate land as indicated in the table above.

The amount of space taken up by buildings is extremely variable, depending on climate and extent of arable land as much as anything else, but is essentially negligible when compared to the size of nearby fields. Buildings might provide anywhere from 10 to 40 square feet of space per person, and anything from 10% to 100% extra space might be taken up by lanes and alleys, gardens, courtyards, and other exterior spaces around homes. Wealthier households and households in colder climates have more indoor space and provide indoor space for animals as well, resulting in combined barn-homes. The body heat large animals provide is very welcome in winter. Warmer climates usually lead to more outside space like courtyards and fenced-in compounds. Either way, even generous allowances for space make it unlikely that the living area taken up by a village will surpass a single acre. Once they settle down to doing agriculture, humans almost universally build square or rectangular houses; rectangular houses in the same village often end up oriented in the same direction.

Finally, areas around peasant villages often left woodland and other "waste" areas for wild resources: honey, mushrooms, foraging for pigs, wood for construction, and so on. Peasants probably wouldn't be allowed to hunt in those areas, but they might nevertheless try to poach rabbits and birds. There are likely to be at least one or two acres still "wild" per person (not per household), but it's possible to get by with less if the crops grown are particularly versatile (for example, if homes are built entirely from mud and straw, reducing the need for wood to next to nothing).

The household wouldn't necessarily have owned or otherwise controlled all of that land, nor would it have been consolidated around the household. A house might have had a bit of garden around it and perhaps a pen for holding animals overnight, but the farmland was likely a section, or even several different sections, of a large communal field, pasturage for animals would have taken the form of a village green or a sparsely vegetated area of waste land, and any intentionally preserved wild areas would have been beyond the bounds of the village itself.

As *GURPS Fantasy* notes, a single village and its related farmland is unlikely to cover an area of more than 1,600 acres, though the wild lands it draws from can be farther away. Theoretically it could be as high as up to about 2,000 acres if population densities are very low. Such a village won't have a population of more than 1,000, even at the best of times, and will probably be much smaller. However, that just puts a limit on how many people can live close together. A village, as a social and legal unit, may consist of multiple clusters of houses each separated by an areas of fields or common pasture, with a few more outlying homes places as their independent-minded occupants see fit. Finally, the fields will be punctuated and surrounded by patches of woodland and pasture.

All things being equal, settlements would tend to assume a hexagonal distribution across the landscape. To demonstrate possible relationships between villages, the table below indicates the average distance between villages (in miles), given a range of population densities and village populations:

Land Use Example

From the example above, a farmer is growing 2,610 pounds of barley, 315 pounds of wheat, and 570 pounds of peas. The GM decides the effective yield for barley is 450 lbs./acre, the yield for wheat is 315 lbs./acre, and the yield for peas is 380 lbs./acre. The farmer, therefore, is growing 5.8 acres of barley, one acre of wheat, and 1.5 acres of peas, for at total of 8.3 acres.

At TL1-2, the farmer needs another 8.3 acres to lie fallow, or 4.15 acres at TL3-4. Assuming 1 acre of wild land per person and an average household of 5 people, this peasant family needs 21.6 acres of land at TL1-2 or 17.45 acres at TL3-4.

Avg. Population	Population density (people per square mile)							
	5	10	15	20	25	50	75	100
250	4.0	2.8	2.3	2.0	1.8	1.3	1.0	0.9
500	5.6	4.0	3.3	2.8	2.5	1.8	1.5	1.3
750	6.9	4.9	4.0	3.5	3.1	2.2	1.8	1.5
1000	8.0	5.6	4.6	4.0	3.6	2.5	2.1	1.8

If the peasant typical of the village in the animals example, the 100 households require just over 2,258 acres at lower TLs or 1,843 at higher TLs. However, only about 1,660 of that is farmland at the lower TLs and 1,245 at the upper, so such a settlement would strain but not quite break practical limits for a settlement size.

However, all things are never equal. A number of factors will influence the placement of villages in the landscape. The most important is that good farmland is hardly evenly distributed, so villages won't be either. People will live where the good farmland is, clustering together with easy access to good fields and ignoring large patches of less desirable land. Villages are more likely to crop up on the sides of hills (and, if they're not too tall and already occupied by feudal strongholds, the tops), taking up a minimum of valuable farmland. However, they'll also cluster close to streams and ponds to take advantage of access to a water supply and possibly fishing. A village may end up strung out along a road, if there is one, to make it easier to get to the nearest church, mill, etc. Villagers might want to spread their homes out across the landscape to be closer to individual fields but be forced by circumstances to live close together for defense or simply for companionship.

Likewise, the numbers presented here may create the impression of much higher potential populations than were found anywhere in history but, again, the local geography will be a determining factor. A square mile of good farmland might support nearly a thousand people, but that wouldn't be a representative square mile. Rivers and lakes, mountains and hills, marshes, large forests, rocky patches, and simply land with poor soil are all unsuitable for the kinds of intensive cultivation described here and will keep population densities over large areas down. At the beginning of the Middle Ages, England and much of France had 5 to 10 people per square mile. Typical population densities in Europe's later Middle Ages were in the 50-75 people per square mile range, with a few particularly highly populated countries (for example, Holland, a relatively small country not known for vast deserts or mountain ranges which might drive down population density) reaching as many as 100 per square mile at the dawn of the Renaissance.

Another large-scale concern, this one in time rather than in space, is soil exhaustion. Early agricultural techniques (for example, slash-and-burn) provide initial fertility every bit as good as later TLs, but they exhaust the soil quickly and force farmers to move on after a few years. Fortunately for low-TL farmers, population densities are usually low enough that there's new land to move on to. Higher TL crop rotation systems spread out the agricultural burden and give fields time to recover. But that only slows the soil's decline to periods measurable in decades rather than years. Peasants might slowly move from one set of fields to another abandoned by their fathers or grandfathers as their own soil becomes inadequately fertile over the generations. It has been suggested that Europe was reaching its maximum agricultural carrying capacity by the time the Black Plague hit and that soil quality was deteriorating despite the

Colonization

So far, we've described a fairly static system. Given so many peasants (and a range of economic and technical assumptions), they are likely to use so much land, and vice versa. But what happens if conditions change? What if, for example, a bunch of new peasants move into the area, or if new generations subdivide the same land?

Not surprisingly, it's a complex question without entirely predictable results. In the long term, it appears that increased population densities can result in increased yields, up to a point. The relatively high yields achieved by imperial Roman and Renaissance farmers may very well have been the result of practices such as multiple plowings and intensive weeding, practical when there's lots of labor to go around but difficult when labor is in short supply, as in the low-yield early Middle Ages. On the other hand, suddenly tossing a bunch of new people into an existing village is likely to lead to explosive social conflict as the natives see their homes threatened. New farmers will probably have to clear their own land out by cutting down forests

three-field system. Had the plague not killed so many people so quickly, Europe might have faced widespread famine instead.

At any rate, soil depletion is unlikely to be a pressing concern for individual TL3-4 farmers, in that people have several years to deal with it before anyone starts starving. However, from a world-building point of view, it's worth keeping in mind that areas with very high population densities may soon face a collapse in their agricultural production as fields become exhausted and the farmers have nowhere else to go.

or terracing hillsides. Any ambitious ruler intent on new settlement will have to cover the cost of living for incoming peasants for at least a year and probably longer. Even then, the quality of the new land is unpredictable, so it might not be able to support the new population.

Death And . . . What Was That Other Thing?

So far, we've sketched out the agricultural basis of low-tech economies, and how most people support themselves once they've settled down to live in one place. In part two, we'll be looking at more social and political aspects. In particular, we'll be dealing with taxation and support of non-farmers, and how this all plays into supporting cities, towns, and wealthy overlord.

Daughters of Eve

for *GURPS*

by Fade Manley

It's said that long ago in the garden of Eden, Adam gave names to all of the animals, and to every creature under the heavens. In this way man was given dominion of the earth. What is not said in those pages is that Eve in turn was given dominion over all that remained: the nameless. No one knows where Adam's gone, but Eve still wanders the world, and she still holds the power God once gave her.

A few millennia give a woman plenty of time to build a power base, and even with the occasional setbacks that come with the fall of empires, Eve has learned how to keep herself quite secure. These days, she holds stock in companies across the world, owns property in dozens of countries, and is seldom seen in public. When she does appear, she's a short woman with dark skin and dark hair, pleasant in appearance but no stunning beauty; she dresses professionally, and usually has a large dog at her side.

Eve is clever enough to never name her pets.

When she was much younger, Eve's oldest son killed her second son, and she's never forgotten this tragedy, nor stopped considering herself guilty for failing to raise Cain and Abel appropriately. From time to time she'll take a lover or husband and have new children, but she always fosters these new sons and daughters out to carefully selected families; she has no confidence in her own ability to raise them. Having Eve as one's mother is a useful justification for supernatural abilities, or simply for an unusual trust fun that provides plenty of opportunity for adventuring.

The death of Abel gave Eve her first, and primary, cause: to fight against death. She funds political groups that oppose the death penalty, research into cures for fatal diseases, soup kitchens, law enforcement groups, and any other means of staving off death a little longer. She's seen enough nations rise and fall in her time that she's entirely willing to work outside of the law if it suits her goals.

Daughters of Eve

Eve is immortal, but one body can only do so much. While her children are precious and given away, she also makes servants of her own design to supervise and carry out her projects. These Daughters of Eve are created from the souls and bodies of dying animals that were never named -- the difficulty of finding a dying human with no name making using human souls impractical -- and shaped into human-looking creatures with powers of their own. (Eve also makes new Daughters of Eve in the form of animals, but these are less useful and so less common.) As the name implies, these are all female; Eve doesn't trust herself to raise sons.

Daughters of Eve are, like their creator, unaging: however, they are not immortal, and can be killed with some difficulty. They tend towards cool, pragmatic outlooks on human life and free will, having been made as adults and then set promptly to work once given enough skills to complete their jobs. Eve has enough influence and money to get her servants appropriate identification and fabricated backgrounds, letting them spread out and infiltrate whatever organizations she finds useful. A few remain Zeroed (as per the *Basic Set* advantage), working on covert missions.

With a successful Perception roll, a Daughter of Eve knows if any person or animal she sees has a name, and what that name is; furthermore, with Will roll, she can command nameless creatures. (This is less useful than one might think, especially in an urban environment where even stray dogs are likely to have names; however, it's invaluable when traveling through the wilderness.) Beyond this and their lack of aging, Daughters of Eve are simply unusually talented humans, with a serious Duty and a good resource network.

Occasionally, one of Eve's servants will (deliberately or through carelessness) kill someone in the course of her duties. If sufficiently contrite, the Daughter will be allowed to continue service of Eve after a period of unpleasant tasks given as punishment. (Being forced to deal with the paperwork necessary for passing on resources for several dozen Daughters of Eve as they transition between different identities is a popular one.) An insufficiently apologetic Daughter will be released "into the wild" for a time to live her life without the companionship of others like her or the tasks of her creator: most, after a few decades of no support structure, come back home asking for penance and re-admittance.

A few Daughters of Eve have decided they no longer wished to serve, and attempted to take advantage of Eve's resources for themselves, or even go public with her secrets. So far, all of these have been politely, carefully retrieved by other servants, and placed in very comfortable, secure lodging where pleasant psychologists can discuss this need to act out with them for as long as it takes to correct the behavior.

Daughter of Eve   *118 points*

Attributes: **ST** 11 [10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 11 [20]; HT 11 [10]

Advantages: Charisma 1 [5], Patron (Eve, 9 or less) [15], Unaging [15], Psychometry (Names Only, -100%; Only Living Creatures, -20%; Ranged +40%; Increased Ranged, 10x, +30%) [13], Mind Control (Universal, +50%; Only On Creatures With No Names, -40%; Only After Psychometry Has Been Successfully Used, -10%) [50].

Disadvantages: Duty (9 or less) [-5], Sense of Duty (other Daughters of Eve) [-5], Vow (No killing of named creatures) [-5], Secret (Daughter of Eve) [-20], Workaholic [-5].

An exiled Daughter loses her Patron and Duty, and may have lost her Vow and Sense of Duty as well. Daughters of Eve may have varying levels of Duty (and it may be hazardous) depending on what their current assignment is.

Plot Seeds

Are You My Mother?: Any adopted PC (or associated NPC) who's been getting too involved in violence may find that his long-absent birth mother is suddenly taking an interest in his life again. Or in any case, someone who claims to be his mother has suddenly appeared to offer various financial benefits and a comfortable position in some company, if the child will just give up his violent ways. This is especially plausible in a fantasy setting where PCs are running about killing off other sentient creatures. If the character refuses, Eve will assign one of her servants to insinuate herself into the child's life, to be a "good influence."

The Bad Seed: A Daughter of Eve has decided to sneak off with a great many of her creator's secrets, and her siblings are running out of time to stop her before she starts letting them loose. For best results, the renegade Daughter claims to be a former agent of a shadowy conspiracy, in need of the PCs' protection and help, shortly before the other Daughters of Eve come looking for her and asking for help in getting her back.

Behind The Curtain: Best if used in conjunction with the Dark Eve (below), the PCs discover that a group they work for is actually being controlled by someone else with ulterior motives. "How" is a good question, and it may take a while for them to suspect cute little Mary Joe in Accounting who's always so helpful and remembers everyone's names. This becomes more complicated if the campaign uses a more benevolent version of Eve: will the PCs still feel compelled to return control of the organization to its rightful leaders if the person manipulating the group is doing so for good reasons?

We Few, We Band Of Sisters: An entire PC party could be composed of Eve's elite trouble-shooters, sent off to clean up other Daughters' messes, infiltrate more dangerous organizations, and find ways to prevent death. This works best for a spy-style campaign of discovering and preventing terrorist plots, but with a slightly darker Eve these Daughters may be authorized to kill if necessary in pursuit of their goals.

Flavors of Eve

Dark Eve: Perhaps so many millennia of trying to make up for a single ancient tragedy have driven Eve mad, and now she not only works around the law, but works to actively suborn entire governments to her desires. In this variation, the Daughters of Eve are deliberately working to take over several nations, and possibly have already succeeded in some; once Eve is the ruler of the world, after all, she can stop all the nonsense of war, and put in enough legal safeguards to make murder a thing of the past. Or so she believes. Any servants who object are said to be "confined and re-educated," but are really disassembled and their souls re-used for fresh, memories-free Daughters of Eve who will perhaps be better at doing what they're told.

Cyberpunk: Eve's ability to create completely zeroed and talented adults puts her in high demand, while her resolute commitment to no killing is a serious liability. She owns her own corporation (or three), and works very quietly against the prevailing "life is cheap" culture present in this setting. She also has a reputation for being an employer who you can always trust to carry through on her end of the deal, so long as you keep to her no-fatality standards for missions.

Yrth: It's unlikely that the Biblical Eve would have reached Yrth via the Banestorms that only sprang up so much later in Earth's history. Instead, Eve may be an ancient elven sorceress who's discovered how to make golems that can reliably pass for human. In this case, there would be no possibility of Daughters of Eve going rogue, being bound to serve her. For a darker version, she might be a powerful undead creature instead, with good reason to never be seen in public during the day; her Daughters are lesser versions of undead bound to her will, both weaker and more able to pass for human.

In a different twist, try an Eve who really *is* a divinely created foremother of a species . . . not only humans, but elves and goblins and orcs as well. Now that her long-separated children have been thrown together again, she's even more committed to finding ways to prevent them from warring with each other. The secret of common origins is also one the Dark Elves would kill to keep secret, if they found out.

Infinite Worlds: Eve's traveled between the worlds, setting up different societies in the past, and now finds her children clashing with each other again. Daughters of Eve have access to equipment that lets them move between worlds, and form a hidden third part to the Centrum/Homeline conflict. Not only do they have the secret of common origins and their mother to protect, but they're dedicated to eliminating killing, no matter which side is doing it.

In Nomine: This is the literal Eve, from the actual garden of Eden, and much like Lilith, she can make celestials of her own design. Her power is over nameless things, and so Eve's essence is to be Wordless. Her enmity with Lilith is boundless, at least from Eve's point of view: Lilith may not have ever found out that Eve didn't die and go to Heaven as expected. Some Superiors have probably discovered her existence by this point, but it's confidential information and not something your average Servitor would hear about.

The Daughters of Eve are angels (starting at 7 Forces rather than 9), though ones who have never seen Heaven; Eve bound them together from Forces taken from dying animals, and immediately into vessels of her own design. A Daughter of Eve's resonance is to know, with a Perception roll, the name of anyone they see; with a Will roll, they may command a nameless creature they've so perceived for CD hours. It is dissonant for them to kill anyone named.

Lucinda: Self-Made Goddess of the Undead

for *GURPS*

by Bevan Thomas

Few fantasy archetypes are as prominent or horrific as the necromancer. Lords of the undead and masters of death and decay, they are the blackest of black magicians and symbols of corruption and insanity.

Lucinda the Divine is an example of a necromancer whose goals extend beyond simply laying waste to the kingdom with hordes of zombies and hosts of demons. Her insanity runs along different lines than crazed revenge. Instead, she believes herself a goddess, and that she must call forth her worshippers from their graves below the earth.

Her description assumes she is an inhabitant of the fantasy world of Yrth (see **GURPS Banestorm**), specifically of the country of Cardiel. However, Lucinda can easily be adapted to other worlds.

Background

Lucinda was born into a wealthy merchant family in Cardiel. Her parents died in a boating accident when she was five, and so she was raised by her brother Conrad, who was 12 years her senior. When Lucinda was 12, she uncovered a secret door in her house that led to a secret room filled with strange books and even stranger objects. She decided to keep it a secret, even from Conrad, and became determined to learn all that she could about the room.

After investigating the place, Lucinda discovered that her father had secretly been a necromancer, and that he had dedicated years to understand the Dark Art. Apparently, the man had performed numerous experiments on the walking dead, and had eventually designed a spell to create beings he referred to as "thinking zombies": animated corpses that retained their own intelligence, but were still completely loyal to their creator. Lucinda was pleased to discover that she had magical talent, and she spent a lot of her time in that special room over the next few years. Hidden from everyone and learning the power over life and death.

To Lucinda's horror, her beloved brother Conrad suffered a stroke and died when she was 25. Determined not to be parted from him, she dragged his corpse into her father's room, and using the books as a guide, mummified Conrad. Then she feverishly performed her magic, and her brother rose as a thinking mummy.

For three months, Lucinda's life returned to relative normalcy (fortunately the family, despite its wealth, had no servants or close friends to discover the abnormality). Conrad seemed more-or-less the same . . . except that he was a desiccated corpse that never slept nor ate, and that he was completely obedient to Lucinda and lacking in any personal initiative. The stress of having to command Conrad, the brother who had been almost a father to her, eventually took its toll on Lucinda's already shaky sanity. She had the firm belief that Conrad was always right, and if he was always right and worshipped her, then logically she must be someone worthy of worship. A goddess.

With time, Lucinda's mind crumbled completely. She decided she was a goddess, and as a goddess, she needed to be worshipped. She announced to Conrad that they were going to leave the house and all its wealth behind, and wander the world preaching her divinity.

Lucinda's cult is currently composed of around 100 zombies (skeletons, mummies, and the like). Most of them are zombies created through Mass Zombie, with a few thinking zombies who serve as priests (including Melissa, the "high priestess of Lucinda"). The normal zombies dress in black robes, and the priests dress in gray. The zombies spend most of their time walking, singing hymns, and banging gongs as they go (as almost all the undead have Disturbing Voice, they produce a truly horrific cacophony). Save for occasionally protecting her from the clergy, angry mobs, or other opponents, this is usually the only task Lucinda requires of them. Her "gospel" is vague and undefined, mainly

about how she is the "queen of life and death," and that the only afterlife is becoming a zombie. A lot of the hymns are about the zombies praising Lucinda for showing mercy on them by bringing them back to life.

When not creating new followers, Lucinda is usually basking in her cult's worship. She used to the study the dead, and now her only purpose in life is to be worshipped by them. It's after all her right as a goddess.

Lucinda the Divine   *234 points*

Age 27; 5'2"; 120 lbs.; She is a slim woman with long brown hair and hazel eyes. Lucinda is usually dressed in her "divine vestments," which is a long white robe and a crown manufactured from human bones. She usually moves from place to place by way of a palanquin carried by four zombies.

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 11 [10].
Dmg 1d-2/1d-1 [0]; BL 16 lbs. [0]; HP 10 [2]; Will 16 [15]; Per 10 [-15]; FP 13 [6].
Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.

Social Background

TL: 3. **CF:** Christian Region [0]. **Languages:** Anglish (Native) [0]; Latin (Accented) [4].

Advantages

Ally (Conrad, almost all the time) [9]; Ally (Melissa, almost all the time) [6]; Ally Group (undead horde) [12]; Charisma 3 [15]; Magery 2 [25]; Serendipity 3 [45]; Single-Minded [5]; Voice [10].

Disadvantages

Delusion ("I am a goddess and should be worshipped") [-15]; Fanaticism [-15]; Megalomania [-10]; Overconfidence [-5]; Reputation -5 (self-proclaimed goddess with a zombie cult) [-25]; Social Stigma (excommunicated) [-5].

Skills

Area Knowledge (Cardiel)-13 [1]; Detect Lies-10 [4]; Diplomacy-12† [2]; Expert Skill (thanatology)-13 [4]; Housekeeping-13 [1]; Intimidation-15 [1]; Knife-11 [1]; Leadership-17* [4]; Navigation (land)-13 [2]; Occultism-12 [1]; Public Speaking-18‡ [2]; Research-13 [2]; Religious Ritual (her cult)-13 [4]; Riding (horse)-10 [1]; Singing-13† [1]; Smallsword-10 [1]; Survival (plains)-11 [4]; Teaching-13 [2]; Thaumatology-11 [2]; Theology (her cult)-13 [4]

* Includes +3 Charisma bonus
† Includes +2 for Voice
‡ Includes +3 for Charisma and +2 for Voice

Spells

Bravery-13 [1]; Control Zombie-14 [2]; Death Vision-13 [1]; Emotion Control-13 [1]; Entrap Spirit-13 [1]; Fear-13 [1]; Lend Energy-13 [1]; Lend Vitality-13 [1]; Loyalty-13 [1]; Mass Zombie-14 [4]; Minor Healing-13 [1]; Recover Energy-15 [4]; Sense Emotion-13 [1]; Sense Foes-13 [1]; Sense Spirit-13 [1]; Soul Jar-12 [1]; Steal Energy-13 [1]; Steal Vitality-13 [1]; Summon Spirit-13 [1]; Terror-13 [1]; Thinking Zombie-14 [4]; Turn Spirit-13 [1]; Turn Zombie-14 [2]; Zombie-14 [2]; Zombie Summoning-14 [2]

The Divine Scepter

Lucinda's "divine scepter" is a three-foot rod made from bone and tipped with an onyx gem. The rod has been enchanted with the Staff spell and the gem is a Powerstone with capacity 15 (and the following quirks: must be laid in a tomb to recharge, may not be used on cats, and makes a strange whistling sound when used). She found it on the desk in her father's room.

Conrad the Scribe

After his parents died, Conrad divided his time between looking after their merchant empire and looking after his younger sister Lucinda. A dedicated and dull man, he had little time or interest in anything else. Then at 37, he died of a stroke, and came back to "life" as his sister's undead slave.

As he had preferred to communicate by letters instead of face-to-face in his work, Conrad was able to continue running the business as a mummy. When Lucinda decided that she was a goddess, Conrad followed her out into the world. However, before they left, he sent off a few letters that placed the business temporarily in the hands of subordinates and would allow him to access the money if he needed to.

Now Conrad functions as his sister's scribe and chronicler, recording all the things she does and says, and writing down her constantly shifting gospel. In his own way, Conrad is happy. After all, he is keeping his mind occupied with work, and in his work he is serving his sister-mistress. What more could an undead slave ask for?

Conrad the Scribe   *192 points*

Age 39; 6'; 130 lbs.; As a mummy, Conrad's skin is shriveled and desiccated, pulled tight over his bones. He still wears the elegant mercantile suits he wore in life, and always has a pair of spectacles perched on his dried-up nose. What hair Conrad has left is black, and his eyes glow a faint red. His voice is a disturbing hiss.

ST 11 [0]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 11 [10] Dmg 1d-1/1d+1 [0]; Basic Lift 24 [0]; HP 15 [0]; Will 15 [10]; Per 13 [0]; FP 11 [0]
Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.

Social Background

TL: 3.
CF: Christian Region [0]; Muslim Region [1]
Languages: Anglish (Native) [0]; Arabic (Accented) [2]; Aralaise (Accented) [2]; Elvish (Accented) [2]; Latin (Native) [4].

Advantages

High Manuel Dexterity 2 [10]; Language Talent [10]; Lightning Calculator [5]; No Dead Broke [25]; Patron (Lucinda, almost all the time) [30]; Wealth (wealthy) [20]

Disadvantages

Callous [-5]; Duty (keeping track of his sister's cult) [-10]; Phobia (coitophobia) [-10]; Thinking Mummy [-32]

Quirks: Attentive; Careful; Dull; Still insists on wearing his glasses [-4]

Skills

Accounting-13 [4]; Administration-14 [4]; Area Knowledge (Cardiel)-14 [2]; Detect Lies-12 [2]; Diplomacy-11 [4];

Expert Skill (natural philosophy)-12 [2]; Finances-13 [4]; Knife-11 [1]; Mathematics-13 [4]; Merchant-13 [2]; Occultism-12 [1]; Religious Ritual (cult of Lucinda)-11 [1]; Riding (horse)-10 [1]; Theology (cult of Lucinda)-14 [8]; Writing-13 [2]

*-2 for Disturbing Voice

High Priestess Melissa

In life, Melissa was a mousy, gentle nun who spent most of her time looking after the sick and helping plants grow. Then one day she tripped, fell down the well, and drowned. A few weeks later, Lucinda and her worshippers passed by and the necromancer looked at Melissa's headstone, which declared "she loved God with all her heart." In honor of the woman's dedication, Lucinda performed her magic, and the now maggot-ridden Melissa clawed her out from the grave to meet her mistress.

Lucinda decided to make Melissa priestess of her cult, second only to the necromancer and Conrad in importance. The zombie has served her goddess well, leading the rest of creatures in hymns and doing her best to preach the gospel. Even in death, Melissa is gentle and nurturing, and usually tries to help anyone who she sees is hurt. Of course, few would accept the aid of a rotting corpse.

Melissa obeys Lucinda slavishly. In the back of her mind, she is unsure about the necromancer's divinity. However, the high priestess knows one thing for certain. She loves Lucinda with all her heart, and just wants to see her happy.

High Priestess Melissa   *79 points*

Age 22; 5'4"; 120 lbs.; Melissa used to be an attractive woman, now she is a rotten corpse. What skin she has left is gray and decayed, and the remnants of her once honey blonde hair resembles dirty straw. Her blue eyes are gone, leaving only her socket from which glows faint red light. For some reason, her rotting has stopped, so she has not become a complete skeleton, but still bare bone are visible on many parts of her body. Her scratchy voice is not as disturbing as that of the other zombies, but is still a far cry from what she had in life. She is usually dressed in the gray robes of Lucinda's clergy.

ST 11 [0]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 10 [40]; **HT** 11 [10]

Dmg 1d-1/1d+1 [0]; Basic Lift 24 [0]; HP 15 [0]; Will 8 [-10]; Per 10 [0]; FP 11 [0]
Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.

Social Background

TL: 3.
CF: Christian Region [0]
Languages: Anglish (Native) [0]; Latin (Accented) [4].

Advantages

Charisma 2 [10]; Clerical Investment [5]; Healer 2 [20]; Intuition [15]; No Disturbing Voice [-10]; Patron (Lucinda, almost all the time) [45]; Religious Rank (Cult of Lucinda) 3 [15]

Disadvantages

Duty (preaching the faith of Lucinda, quite often) [-10]; Pacifism (self-defense only) [-30]; Secret (passionately in love with Lucinda)[-10]; Selfless (12) [-5]; Thinking Zombie [-103]

Skills

Area Knowledge (Cardiel)-10 [1]; Diplomacy-10 [4]; First Aid-14* [4]; Gardening-12 [4]; Knife-11 [1]; Musical Instrument (gong)-10 [4]; Naturalist-10 [4]; Navigation (land)-10 [2]; Pharmacy (herbal)-12* [4]; Public Speaking-12 [4]; Religious Ritual (cult of Lucinda)-11 [8]; Religious Ritual (Christianity)-8 [1]; Riding (horse)-10 [1]; Singing-13 [4]; Theology (cult of Lucinda)-11 [8]; Theology (Christianity)-8 [1]

*+2 for Healer 2

Gerard

Gerard was a thief too clever for his own good. He took part in a robbery with three other people, and tried to skip town with all the loot. His former partners caught up with him, cut Gerard's throat, and tossed him in the river. The next day, he was discovered by Lucinda, and on a whim she raised him from the dead as one of her clergy.

For some reason, Gerard is not the slave of the necromancer. He has no idea why he has been spared that part of zombiehood, and is really unsure of what to do. If he leaves the cult, then he will likely be killed by some overzealous cleric or monster-hunter. Besides, where could he possible go? If he stays, then he'll be spending his unlife singing hosannas to a maniac. And who knows what would happen if Lucida discovers his will is independent. Perhaps she would exile him from the cult, kill him, or possiblly experiment on him to see why the slave mentality never set in. Whatever she would do, Gerard is in no hurry to find out.

Gerard is lying low, doing his best to behave like all the rest of the thinking dead in the cult. He is desperately trying to think of a way out of his problem, though his mind isn't what it was when he was alive. Until a solution presents itself, he'll just do as the other clergy does, and hope that no one notices anything wrong.

Gerard   *116 points*

Age 37; 6'5"; 200 lbs.; Gerard looks to be a tall, muscular man with short brown hair and a short beard. He is currently dressed as a priest of the cult in long gray robes, and keeps a dagger hidden in his boot. He has only recently started to rot.

ST 12 [10]; **DX** 13 [60]; **IQ** 10 [40]; **HT** 11 [10] Dmg 1d-1/1d+2 [0]; Basic Lift 20 [0]; HP 15 [0]; Will 12 [10]; Per 10 [0]; FP 11 [0]
Basic Speed 6 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 9.

Social Background

TL: 3. **CF:** Christian Region [0] **Languages:** Anglish (Native) [0]

Advantages

Danger Sense [15]; No Slave Mentality [40]; Smooth Operator 2 [30]

Disadvantages

Duty (singing the hymns of Lucinda, quite often) [-10]; Greed (9) [-22]; Kleptomania (12) [-15]; Overconfidence (12) [-5]; Secret (is not enslaved to Lucinda) [-30]; Thinking Zombie [-103]

Skills

Acting-12 [8]; Area Knowledge (slums of Ten-Tiri)-11 [2]; Brawling-13 [1]; Detect Lies-10 [4]; Escape-13 [4]; Fast-Talk-12 [8]; Filch-14 [4]; Intimidation-12 [2]; Knife-13 [1]; Lockpicking-11 [4]; Musical Instrument (gong)-8 [1]; Observation-10 [2]; Pickpocket-13 [4]; Religious Ritual (cult of Lucinda)-8 [1]; Running-11 [2]; Search-11 [4]; Shadowing-11 [4]; Singing-9 [1]; Smuggling-10 [2]; Stealth-14 [4]; Streetwise-11 [2]; Theology (cult of Lucinda)-8 [1]

Note that Disturbing Voice (from the Thinking Zombie template) and Smooth Operator 2 cancel each other out for all this skills except for Singing (which gets -2).

Lucinda and Her Cult in the Campaign

Lucinda's goal is very simple: Create as big a congregation as possible who will praise her name. Right now, she desires nothing more than that. However, it is likely that soon she will tire of simple hymns and wish for her divinity to be proven in more elaborate ways. Perhaps she will demand that a temple be built in her honor, that mightier undead (such as vampires and wraiths) be created to serve her, that the living should be made to offer tribute to the self-made queen of life and death, or even that the living must be die so that in death they may worship her!

If the necromancer is confronted by a threat, she prefers to use her various mind control spells to cause her opponents to flee in fear or bow before her glory. If that tactic proves ineffective, Lucinda will unleash her followers. After the undead congregation has finished its grisly task, she will show "the goddess' mercy" and raise the bodies of her fallen foes as new devoted acolytes.

In all likelihood, player characters will encounter Lucinda and her cult as foes. The general populace, especially the clergy, will be disturbed to say the least by so many corpses leaving their graves to worship a megalomaniacal sorceress, and will desperately want the problem to be solved as quickly and decisively as possible.

Alternately, Lucinda might attract the attention of another, more aggressive necromancer who wants her zombies and her father's grimoires (which the woman usually keeps on her palanquin). Heroes might be forced to support Lucinda as the lesser of two evils, assisting in her battle against her opponent. One interesting possibility in the duel is for the rival necromancer to cast Control Zombie on Conrad or Melissa, making them spy on or even fight against their beloved former mistress.

GMs who wish a more unusual campaign could have the player character die and then be reanimated as members of the cult. Like Gerard, they would somehow end up without Slave Mentality, and would likely form a tentative an alliance with the former thief as they try and figure out what to do.

Variations On A Theme

Lucinda the Demon

In this version, Lucinda was long ago replaced by a powerful demon. He is using the form of the necromancer to spread blasphemy and empty the graves of the dead all in preparation for some horrific goal. As a compromise, the "goddess" could still be Lucinda, but she is being manipulated by a demon from behind the scenes.

Lucinda the Psionicist

A variation that is particularly appropriate for a science fiction campaign is to make Lucinda a powerful telepath instead of a necromancer. Here she uses a version of Mind Control to turn people into her puppets (showing them the "glory" of the goddess). Possibly when Conrad had a stroke, he fell into a trance, and Lucinda subconsciously used her power to wake him up, though she believed she raised him from the dead. Alternately, she might use a form of psychokinesis to animate the bodies and is deluded in thinking the corpses possess any sapience (if Lucinda has multi-personalities, than it's possible Conrad, Melissa, Gerard, and maybe others have each been invested with one of the

personalities in question).

Lucinda's Secret Temple

If the GM wants Lucinda to be a little subtler -- a necessity in a modern horror or "low fantasy" campaign -- then the cult could be gathering secretly. At night she sends out her disciples to rob graves and return the corpses to her that she brings to life. Then, in a hall deep underneath the ground, the dead sing of her glories while above them the living go about their business.

Templates

Necromancer

Few wizards are as feared as the necromancer. He is a specialist in the magic of spirits and the dead, devoting his time to the conjuration of dark forces. Though some people learn the black arts in order to better fight the undead, most are at best morbid academics and far too often monsters who have purged themselves of all human feeling in their search for forbidden knowledge and even more forbidden power.

Necromancer   *152 points*

Attributes: **ST** 9 [-10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d-1[0]; BL 16 lbs. [0]; HP 10 [2]; Will 16 [15]; Per 10 [-15]; FP 13 [6]; Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Language (Accented) [4]; Magery 2 [25]; and 30 points chosen from Allies (familiar or undead slaves) [Varies]; Ally Group (followers) [Varies]; Channeling [10]; Charisma [5/level]; Eidetic Memory [5 or 10]; Fatigue Points [3/level]; Fearlessness [2/level]; Medium [10]; Night Vision [1/level]; Single-Minded [5]; Status [Varies]; Versatile [5]; and Will [5/level].

NOTE: Aspected Magery may be selected instead of the normal variety. Dark, Night, or One College (Necromancy) are particularly appropriate choices.

Disadvantages: A total of -30 points selected from Appearance [Varies]; Delusions [-5 to -15]; Callous [-5]; Enemies [Varies]; Fanaticism [-15]; Flashbacks [Varies]; Loner [-5]; Low Empathy [-20]; Manic-Depressive [-10]; Megalomania [-10]; Nightmares [-5]; Obsession [-5 or -10]; Overconfidence [-5]; Paranoia [-10]; Phantom Voices [-5 to -15]; Phobias [Varies]; Reputation [Varies]; Sadism [-15]; Secret [-5 to -20]; and Social Stigma [Varies].

Primary Skill: Select two Necromancy spells, each (H) IQ+2 [4] - 15 or (VH) IQ+1 [4] -14. Select 10 more spells, each (H) IQ -13 or (VH) IQ-1 [1] -12. Most of these spells will either be of the College of Necromancy or prerequisites for Necromancy spells.

Secondary Skills: Expert Skill (thanatology) IQ [4]-13 and select two skills from: Hidden Lore (any), Occultism, or Research, all (A) IQ [2]-13; Archaeology, Physician, Physiology, or Theology, all (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Dreaming or Meditation, both (H) Will-1 [2]-12; or Alchemy or Thaumatology, both (VH) IQ-2 [2]-11.

Background Skills: Select one skill from: Knife (E) DX [1]-11; Professional Skill (Mortician) (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Cloak, Staff, Stealth, or Streetwise all (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Intimidation (A) Will-1 [1]-15; Cryptography, Hypnotism, or Poisons (H) IQ-2 [1]-11; Blowpipe (H) DX-2 [1]-9

Thinking Dead template   *65 points*

Thinking dead are created through the Thinking Zombie spell. Unlike their more common counterparts, they possess a certain level of independent thought, though are still completely obedient to the wizard who created them. Any spells that normally affects undead created with the Zombie spell (Control Zombie, Summon Zombie, etc.) affect the thinking dead as well. Apply this template to the ones found on p. M152 (after combining the two templates, a thinking mummy is -32 points, a thinking skeleton is -97, and a thinking zombie is -103). As usual, the spell cast on a normal corpse results in a zombie, bare bones results in a skeleton, and an embalmed body results in a mummy.

Advantages: No Automaton [85]; No Cannot Learn [30]; No Reprogrammable [10]; No Unhealing (Total) [30]

Disadvantages: No Immunity (All mind control) [-30]; No Indomitable [-15]; No Single-Minded [-5]; Slave Mentality [-40]

Features: Can have mental skills

New Spell

Thinking Zombie (VH)

Regular

This spell is identical to the normal Zombie spell except that it enslaves the owner's soul, producing an undead creature that is still in possession of the mental traits, IQ-based skills, and memories he had in life. The wretch will probably loathe his undead existence, but as long as the spell animates his frame, he must obey his dark master.

College: Necromancy
Duration: The thinking zombie remains animated until destroyed.
Cost: 20.
Time to cast: 1 minute.
Prerequisites: Entrap Spirit and Zombie

Pyramid Review

The Stars Are Right! Nine Disturbing Tales of Mankind's Corruption (for *Call of Cthulhu*)

Published by [Chaosium, Inc.](#)

Written by Fred Behrendt, André Bishop, David Conyers, D. H. Frew, Steve Hatherley, Steven C. Rasmussen, Kevin A. Ross, Gary Sumpter, John Tynes, Richard Watts, & William Jones

Cover by John T. Snyder

Illustrated by Steven Gilberts, Chris Hill, Blair Reynolds & Jason Whitley

Cartography by David Conyers & Tony Santo

176-page b&w softcover; $23.95

The Stars Are Right is like the recent *[Shadows of Yog-Sothoth,](#)* another reprint for *[Call of Cthulhu,](#)* but for use with the modern incarnation of the game, **Cthulhu Now,** rather than the classic period of the 1920s. It is also a decade younger, having originally been published in 1992. Now the original anthology of modern-day scenarios has returned, being reprinted for the first time, but with two significant changes. The more obvious alteration is the addition of two new scenarios to the original seven, the other being an update of the various technologies to make the original seven feel more contemporary.

Physically, **The Stars Are Right!** is an improvement over recent releases for **Call of Cthulhu.** Primarily, this is due to Chaosium not using the same ugly style template that has marred those books (including the *supposed* 6th Edition rulebook), instead using a more contemporary look. Better for it, but like **Shadows of Yog-Sothoth,** the reprinted material is not as sharp and crisp as the original, being slightly murky, slightly blurred; and all in a way that makes Blair Reynolds' artwork, which so dominated the original printing, look most inferior. The same can be said of Tony Santo's original maps. Curiously, all of the new artwork and cartography, which matches the style of the old, does not suffer from this problem.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The first of the nonet is Richard Watts' "Love's Lonely Children," a highly regarded scenario that plunges the investigators into a seamy underworld of drug addiction, prostitution, pornography, incest, murder, and the worship of foul gods. Another notable element is punk rock, but that is by the by in what is a grubby, seedy affair that delivers some nasty little shocks. Like several others in this anthology, this scenario possesses a visceral quality that may not be to everyone's taste. Yet it is well written with plenty of advice for the Keeper and is easily adapted to whichever city he is running his campaign in.

John Tynes' "Nemo Solus Sapit" ("None Shall Walk Alone") is less easily adapted, being set near the fictional Californian coastal city of Samson, previously used in the campaign **At Your Door.** Its set-up should be familiar to most players, best working with an investigator having gone insane and being placed in the care of Doctor Petroff van Dyson. Of course, there is something nasty going on at the van Dyson Center, but uncovering it and unmasking the real

villain before he has his revenge, is another matter. Should that investigator's player be happy to sacrifice the character, there is opportunity here for some great roleplaying, thus serving as a memorable swan song for the character.

To describe André Bishop's "This Fire Shall Kill" as *Backdraft* meets the Mythos is at least an apt description of what is a traditional if surprisingly cinematic adventure. Nominally set in San Francisco, it opens with an investigator returning home to find that that his house has burnt down. This is one way, of course, to divest the investigators of a Mythos tome or two… The finale for this scenario is particularly memorable, requiring the investigators to charge up a burning tower block in order to stop a summoning. There is also the matter of the little girl who really knows how to play with matches…

"The Professionals" by Fred Behrendt requires that the investigators take a job to discredit a candidate in a forthcoming election to the US Senate. The question is, why would they? If the set up is forced, the scenario never really recovers and its elements of sexual scandal, governmental dirty tricks, black technology, and weakly drawn political parallels, never come together. The ending in particular is poor, giving the investigators little to do except stand around as the climax plays itself out. Perhaps "The Professionals" would work better as part of a *Delta Green* campaign, but otherwise this is an uninspiring affair.

If any of the scenarios in this collection show their age, then it is Steve Hatherley's "Fractal Gods," which explores the dark side of a cultural phenomenon now over a decade old. The dangers of summoning creatures via computer was not a new idea then either, the most common creature being the Hound of Tindalos, but the use of Fractals was in 1992. Likewise, the use of the fanzine as means of disseminating the scenario's protagonists feels quaint. This scenario is also the most updated, computer technology having come on leaps and bounds. This is still a good adventure though, and is easily adapted to other locations.

Like the earlier "Nemo Solus Sapit," a doctor using unorthodox methods lies at the heart of Gary Sumpter's "The Gates of Delirium." Investigating a friend's attempted suicide, the characters are exposed to an unexpected physical side effect of her treatment. The treatment is the drug Liao, which not only takes the imbibing patient through the higher dimensions, but also brings back part of the experience to the waking world. For the investigators this manifests as the potentially lethal 13th floor, an eerie experience that the adventure fails to develop. The result is that the adventure is pedestrian in feel and a missed opportunity.

The last of the original seven is Kevin A. Ross' "The Music of the Spheres," which again uses the age-old device of a friend in trouble to get the investigators involved, though to much better effect. The question of why a normally gentle computer technician murdered his girlfriend takes the PCs to his place of work, a radio telescope in Nebraska. The murder is only the first of a series of strange events that center on the telescope and escalate into a maddening frenzy, seemingly triggered by the astronomical team's secret research. This is an effective scenario that involves Mythos elements both major and minor, a notable scene having the latter prepared to parlay with the investigators. If it feels familiar to the dedicated Keeper, it is because of parallels that can be drawn with the campaign, *Spawn of Azathoth.*

The first of the two new scenarios is David Conyers' "Darkest Calling," a missing person case that develops into a moral dilemma for the players. Is a lesser evil conscionable if it stops a greater one? There are some familiar elements here -- American Natives, the rituals of a lost tribe, and the deserts of Arizona, making the adventure reminiscent of the scenarios "Puppet Shows and Shadow Plays" from *Delta Green* and "Devil's Canyon" from *Shadows of Yog-Sothoth.* Fundamentally, the dilemma is what makes this scenario stand out and a fine addition to the anthology.

The second addition and last scenario is "The Source and the End" by William Jones. This is as cinematic as "This Fire Shall Kill" if not more so, as there are even rules for cinematic melee combat included. A garbled message from an old FBI contact takes the investigators to an isolated Colorado town just as a severe thunderstorm closes it down. Threatened by the increasingly dangerous weather and whatever frightened their old contact, the investigators are literally thrown in at the deep end as the town floods. There is a time limit to this adventure, lasting just the one night. Unfortunately, this aspect is left up to the Keeper to handle, but done right this has the potential to be a very atmospheric adventure as the investigators fight to survive and uncover the threat. This scenario would also work for a *Delta Green* game.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Finally the anthology is rounded with an article exploring astrology and the Cthulhu Mythos. In particular, "When the Stars Came Right Again" discusses the significance of the 1925 date in Lovecraft's short story, "Call of Cthulhu." It echoes other in-game semi-scholarly works on the Mythos in other supplements, and while enjoyable enough, is anachronistic given the anthology's modern bent. In a collection of handouts, it would have made a fine addition, but here is much the sore thumb.

Like **Shadows of Yog-Sothoth,** the reprint of this anthology is far from perfect. It requires another edit, and its appearance suffers in the reprint. Its technological updating has not been as well implemented as it could have been, but a Keeper can easily cover this. The scenarios themselves vary in quality, and too many do involve the Great Old Ones. The standout three are "Love's Lonely Children," "This Fire Shall Kill," and "Darkest Calling," and if the rest are not as flexible or useful (though many are, especially for use with **Delta Green**), they are at least a ready source of inspiration. Nevertheless, as one of the few modern-day **Cthulhu Now** anthologies, **The Stars Are Right!** is a welcome reprint.

--Matthew Pook

Appendix Z

Triple Threat
An alternate critical dicing system for *GURPS*

by N.Eric Phillips

There is little more exciting in an RPG than rolling a critical. Whether good or bad it is always a surprise. For those looking to try something different in their *GURPS* campaign while still having an intuitive system, consider this new mechanic for determining critical hits and misses.

GURPS standard dice mechanic of rolls of 3, 4, 17, and 18 on 3d6 to represent criticals. The high rolls are critical failures while the low rolls are critical successes. In the "triple threat" method critical rolls happen whenever all three dice read the same number. This is called a "trip." If you throw the dice and it comes up a trip you know right away something is going to happen.

The standard dicing method in *GURPS* allows high and low skill levels to affect what rolls actually constitute a critical. For instance, a person with an effective skill of 18 only critically fails on a roll of 18, not on 17. The triple threat method scales with skill as well. With an average effective skill (9-11) the character has a critical success if he rolls 1-1-1, 2-2-2 or 3-3-3. Critical failures happen on 4-4-4, 5-5-5 or 6-6-6. However, at an effective skill of 17 he only critically fails on a 1-1-1 result; all other trips correspond to a critical success. The following table shows what trips correspond to critical hits and misses.

Effective Skill	Critical Hit	Critical Miss
5 and lower	1-1-1	2-2-2, 3-3-3, 4-4-4, 5-5-5, 6-6-6
6-8	1-1-1, 2-2-2	3-3-3, 4-4-4, 5-5-5, 6-6-6
9-11	1-1-1, 2-2-2, 3-3-3	4-4-4, 5-5-5, 6-6-6
12-14	1-1-1, 2-2-2, 3-3-3, 4-4-4	5-5-5, 6-6-6
15 and higher	1-1-1, 2-2-2, 3-3-3, 4-4-4, 5-5-5	6-6-6

In *GURPS,* a critical is usually rolled 3.7% of the time. In the triple threat system a critical occurs about 2.8% of the time. However the benefits of easier scaling to skill level plus the excitement of seeing trips makes this variant dice method outweighs the slight difference in critical probability.

Get Creative or Get Docked!

I know I've recounted this tale before, *[LMTYAMC Alert![1]]* but I'll never forget the day that my combat-challenged *Vampire: The Dark Ages* character discovered that she could use her power of telekinesis to lift people high into the air and let them go, in effect letting gravity do the dirty work. She never became a front-line fighter, but at least she had a better Plan A than "Hide. If found, assume death is imminent." I've since learned that it's a relatively common technique, but I'd never seen it before and was quite pleased with myself when I stumbled across it.

In many super-hero comics and movies, one of the most interesting aspects (to me, at any rate) is when one of the characters uses his powers in a neat or interesting fashion. In fact, with some characters or stories this is arguably one of the *only* appeal. The Silver-Age Superman springs to mind; he was so mind-numbingly powerful ("able to juggle planets" powerful) that there was little doubt he would emerge triumphant in any situation; rather, the most interesting aspect of many stories was how he was going to use his powers to resolve the situation. For example, in Alan Moore's Silver-Age capper tale *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* the Daily Planet finds itself under attack by robot men; in response, Superman carries and rubs the giant iron globe atop the Planet building in such a way as to turn it into a giant magnet, drawing all the robots to it.

This appeal of seeing how old powers can be used in new ways isn't limited to the Supers genre. In Piers Anthony's Incarnations of Immortality series, the protagonists are each some personal representation of an abstract concept such as Death, Time, or War. The climax of each of book in the series basically revolves around the main character discovering some neat/new/snazzy application of his abilities . . . usually of the form, "You have tried to assert mastery over Death/Time/War/whatever, but I just remembered that that's *my* domain!" And Robert Asprin's MythAdventures series has many instances of the not-too-powerful wizard Skeeve using his meager magical abilities in new and innovative ways. (To paraphrase the classic Mayfair *Wizards* book, "Who needs a *fireball* spell when you can use a candle-lighting cantrip on a flying arrow?")

Unfortunately, most RPGs don't allow for this kind of improvisation. In fact, most games actively disallow it. A casual perusal of the Sage Advice column from *Dragon Magazine* reveals a constant theme of questions beginning, "Can I use such-and-such-a-spell to do . . .?"; the answer is almost invariably "No."

The first RPG I'm aware of that tried to allow this innovation was the classic 1980's *Marvel Super-Heroes RPG Advanced Set,* which introduced the concept of power stunts. These function exactly as expected, with the player able to utilize their powers in new and interesting ways. The only problem is that usage of these abilities required the expenditure of Karma, the combination experience points and game-altering mechanic that enables things to work out for the character. In fact, doing a power stunt required a crazy amount of Karma, such that -- in my utilizations of the system -- players scoffed at any notion of using them:

Me: "Soooooo . . . anyone wanna do a power stunt?"
Players: "No thanks; we think we'd rather use those points to get the highest possible rolls on our next 10 actions."

Other games have had similar mechanics, but they've all had a similar theme: They view these alternate uses of abilities as something to be paid for by the player. Probably the most well-thought-out system I've seen that's addressed this has been *Mutants & Masterminds,* with its Hero Point system; through the expenditure of a relatively modest number of these points (usually one), the PC can do something oddball with his powers . . . pending GM approval, of course. The problem is that Hero Points are awfully versatile, and it doesn't seem unlikely if players were to avoid using them in lieu of the many other wonderful things they can do.

I posit that a more interesting idea would be to permit as many of these odd-ball attempts at using abilities as possible. In fact, I think it might be interesting if coming up with odd uses for these abilities were *required* by players. For example, in games where special powers, spells, ultra-tech, etc. are a main focus, what if some portion of the player's experience reward at the end of the session was contingent on having used an ability in some neat, new, or snazzy way? Each new usage would only count once (because then it's not "new" anymore). Thus someone playing their

Chummy Neighborhood Rachnidman might ensure he gets his innovation XP by using his Secret Web Stuff in new and interesting ways: as a parachute, to make a cushion to protect someone, to blind an enemy by flinging it in his eyes, and so on.

The attempt doesn't necessarily need to be successful (although I believe the GM should err on the side of allowing innovation). The amount of bonus experience points would determine how "important" such innovation would be; if it's a relatively modest award -- one or two points, in many systems -- then it's merely a nice bonus for those who innovate. But if, say, half of the award is contingent on coming up with an interesting way of using powers, then it becomes more of a necessity.

Although it would seem that these innovations would be limited to characters with versatile powers, I submit that many abilities have more facets than would be immediately considered. For example, a straightforward archer could try various bank shots and trick shots.

Without some incentive to innovate, players tend to fall back on Voltron habits, where the first sign of any trouble prompts the use of the one attack that is most likely to work. Thus when I ran a game of, say, the **Marvel Super Heroes** RPG, someone playing Cyclops would generally just blast the enemy each turn with his eye beam, because that was his best attack. Indeed, doing anything *other* than a direct blast was contraindicated, despite this sequence depicting the most boring comic book fight ever:

"Take that! And that! And some more! And . . . wait, I think I've got some extra! Second verse, same as the first! How 'bout a little fire, scarecrow? "

Hmm . . . maybe it's not as boring as I thought. But you get the picture. I note that this problem has even crept up in the comics; one of the reasons that the Hal Jordan Green Lantern -- the one who went bug-nuts and died for a while -- was replaced was because, despite having one of the most varied and powerful devices in the universe, he pretty much stuck to his standbys of green boxing gloves, green bubbles, and green force walls. When he was replaced by the Kyle Rayner Green Lantern, one of the mandates given to writers and artists was that this character would never do the same thing the same way twice. Thus even when doing something standard, like an entanglement attack, he would do something different each time: a glass jar with holes poked in it, a piece of flypaper, a straightjacket, and so on.

Games wishing to implement this model may want to consider one other rule addendum: the "time out." With this in place, each player can -- once per session (or more, if the GM would like) -- invoke a "time out," which gives him an allotment of time to think of something . . . presumably a creative use of powers. These five minutes (or however long the time out is in effect) can give the player time to sort out some new idea without the pressure of the GM breathing down his neck. Sure, it can break the flow of the game, but a brief pause in the action seems only fair if part of the player's experience reward is gonna rely on what he comes up with.

In some games and some genres, the mystery isn't if the heroes are going to prevail, but *how*. If all the players are agreeable, then an enjoyable campaign can center around letting them tinker with the hows of their victory, rather than pummeling them with a barrage of "No"s.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

[1] "Let me tell you about my character . . ." -- As an aside, this phrase is supposedly the bane of many a White Wolf employee. Curiously, one con I was attending in a retail capacity about 10 years ago or so had me seated directly across from official White Wolf representatives. Throughout the course of the two-day con, I proceeded to hear all about the über-pumped character from the White Wolf rep.

The Pelli and the Lar

by Paul Drye

TO: jrodneywood@nycomm.com
FROM: pcameron@leeds.paralabs.org

I could use your help. I'd like to ask that you attend a teleconference (link in the attachment) next Monday 1730 GMT. We'll be discussing some information passed on by the Extremely Deep Timeline Observatory. Have you heard of them? They're only just getting going the last few months, and their techniques are still wildly experimental. But with them they can dowse out a few lines that moved away from ours hundreds of thousands and even millions of years ago. In particular I've been speaking with Dr. Moretti -- he's in charge of it -- and his group have come up with a really unusual line: it's got at least one and maybe two semi-human intelligent species.

We need some of your reconnaissance background on this one. The EDTO is sampling from a huge number of potential timelines, and some of our higher-ups are worried that this species might be as widespread in their parachronic neck of the woods as Homo sapiens is here. The ones we've found on what we're calling Gemini-1 are pre-industrial, but all it'll take is one timeline of theirs that got some historical breaks and we may be meeting them somewhere, some day. The consensus is that anything we can learn now would help, so we're going in to check this one out on the ground despite the problems we'll have getting there.

Unfortunately we're at a loss for how to do it. We don't look much like the inhabitants, so we're going to stick out, maybe even draw some hostility. I know you were involved with the Lizardia contact way back when; yes, I also know that whole thing was classified, and yes, I know you're retired, but I was hoping you could give us some insight. If you can, could you even give us some thoughts about who we could send?

We've got Moretti, myself, and Sidorova from the University of St. Petersburg sitting in so far, but I'd feel a lot more comfortable if we had someone with practical experience too.

Say hi to Angela for me.

--
Peter

Getting There

The EDTO techniques allow passage to the timelines they find, but it's difficult and dangerous. Unlike the casual journeys of normal parachronics, travelers are restricted to coming and going from one time and place for which the coordinates work -- in this case, calculated at great cost so that one end of the journey is from the an Infinity Labs facility in Naples, Italy on Homeline and the other is the same spot on Gemini-1. Try to use the coordinates from anywhere else and nothing will happen.

Further, the journey requires a long time from the viewpoint of those in the conveyor, several days with necessary stops in intermediate timelines to wait for the next correct alignment of worlds. The exact sequence will be different every time, and needs to be calculated by Dr. Moretti's team at great cost. Return trips follow the same rules, and so the contact team will be given times and routes that they must follow if they're to get back to Homeline. Several return windows will be calculated just in case circumstances prevent any one from being used, but if all are somehow missed the team will be marooned.

Upon arrival in Gemini-1, the adventurers will find themselves near an important trading town on the Bay of Naples (they'll have known it was there from the EDTO's original observations). More importantly, they'll have arrived on the front lines of a long, slow-burning war between two intelligent species.

The Twins

Gemini-1 diverged from Homeline about 4,000,000 years ago. A successful australopithecine scavenger species evolved then and proved able to eke out a living in European and Asian environments. About 450,000 years ago, the island of Sicily was joined to mainland Europe for a brief while, colonized by the descendants of these hominids, then cut off again when ocean levels rebounded. In their new island home, what would become the Pelli gradually shrank in the absence of any predators. The new species' brains stayed about the same size, and the Pelli emerged once the gray matter liberated from running larger bodies let them cross into human-class intelligence.

Unfortunately for them, the land bridge to Europe would periodically re-establish itself, and the Pelli nearly became extinct several times. Their nemeses were the descendents of those left behind, the Lar, who had retained their scavenging and opportunistically carnivorous behavior and were now two and three times larger than the Pelli. Over time, the smaller natives became twilight-dwellers, staying away from their aggressive brethren. Fortunately for them, they were able to hang on each time their home was invaded, and the Lar invariably went extinct in a few thousand years when the ocean rose again and they were cut off from the mainland.

The last cycle of invasion may have come and gone, though. This warm period has been a long one, more than 30,000 years so far, and this time the Pelli have developed civilization. In the last 2,000 years, they have spread by boat to the other major islands of the Mediterranean, and with new weapons in hand have even begun colonizing Italy, pushing the Lar as far north as the Volturno and Ofanto rivers, a line just north of Naples. Pelli culture is now TL2, and they've developed a maritime trading-oriented society reminiscent the ancient Phoenicians

The Pelli

The closest thing to a Pelli on Homeline is a pygmy, though the Pelli are smaller still. They range from three to four feet tall as adults, and rarely exceed 75 pounds. They look broadly human, though their eyes are considerably larger, and they're much hairier than humans except on their faces and heads. If there's a primatologist along on the mission, he'll say they look a cross between Homo sapiens and a uakari monkey.

People aiming for first contact will find the psychological side of the Pelli more important than their physical appearance. Mentally, there are strong similarities between humans and Pelli, mostly because they have similar needs.

They need to eat, they have to sleep, and they want to procreate, just like humans. Even in shared areas, though, the details are different. For example, their facial expressions and body language are different. Someone trying to communicate with them may take some time to figure out that they shrug instead of nod if they want to say "yes" without speaking. The team is going to be tripped up by small things like this many times.

The Pelli also have two emotional needs that regular humans don't, and it makes them act in ways people will find confusing. Pelli are naturally crepuscular, which means that they're active when day is turning into night (or vice versa). Since they developed fire, they've used it as a light source during the night and extended their time awake from one twilight to another through the dark, but they're still at their most alert in the hours around sunset and dawn. Most take a nap in the wee hours of the morning, then they sleep properly while it's daylight. They can function during the day, but definitely don't do it by choice and need to wear eye protection to shade out the worst of the daylight.

One side effect of their attunement to creeping twilight is that the Pelli don't like sudden changes, especially in light. They much prefer it when things change over the course of a few seconds or minutes, or they at least get some warning that something is about to change. Adventurers will find that one thing the Pelli really don't like is the Homeliners' sources of illumination. Flipping a switch and having light flood out all at once irritates them.

Their other unusual thought process is a deeply ingrained idea that their bodies are made of food. Hundreds of thousands of years of being hunted by the Lar have left them ambiguous about eating. Meals are not social gatherings like they are for regular humans; it's actually insulting to eat in another person's presence. Instead, Pelli sleep in collective longhouses, and socialize for the half hour or so before and after sleep. By extension, the Pelli aren't very fond of other activities centered around mouths. They talk, for example, but not nearly as much as Homeline humans. The Pelli will probably find the contact team to be annoyingly chatty. Kissing is a profound insult, as it's taken as a proxy for "I'm eating you." In earlier days, the Pelli even used to eat defeated Lar (and sometimes each other) as a way of overcoming their anxieties about being hunted. Fortunately this is fading away in these civilized days, though it's not entirely gone and the contact team may have to deal with a shocking turn towards cannibalism in their otherwise acceptable hosts.

Taken altogether, the Pelli's mental peculiarities are going to make it more difficult to establish friendly, meaningful contact. Their languages are completely unrelated to any other language encountered by Homeline but, since the Pelli don't like talking at length, don't move around during the day, and want privacy when eating, it's hard to entice them into an extended game of "point and name the object."

Pelli Racial Template   *-14 points*

Attribute Modifiers: ST-3 [-30]; DX+1 [10]; HT+1 [10]

Secondary Attributes: SM-1; Basic Move-1 [-5]

Advantages: Acute Hearing 1 [2]; Night Vision 4 [4]

Disadvantages: Bad Sight (In the sunlight only, mitigated by vision protection, -90%) [-3]

Quirks: Hates watching others eat [-1], Laconic [-1]

The Lar

The eternal adversaries of the Pelli are, from the neck down, even more like humans than their little cousins. They're more heavily built, and a lot hairier, but other than that they're obviously related to Homo sapiens.

What distinguishes them is their heads. They have tiny brain pans, as small as a chimp's -- which is pathetic for a supposedly intelligent species. For the last few million years they've been trading in the possibility of more smarts for better biting. They have huge, powerful jaws and sharp teeth, which makes them look something like bulldogs.

Unfortunately, this also makes them far less intelligent than either Pelli or regular humans.

While their brains are marginal, the Lar are clearly across the line into sentience. They use found objects as bludgeons, and they have their own simple language -- the Pelli have never discovered this, but Homeline investigators can learn that adult Lar have about a hundred words, all concrete nouns and verbs. On the other hand, they don't use fire, don't make clothes or anything but the most rudimentary shelter, and their culture is extremely limited.

Where they really shine is as hunters of medium-sized and small animals. The bulk of their diet is carrion, but when they can they'll make it themselves by killing something, then letting it age, rather than waiting for a large carnivore to give up a carcass. An extended Lar family stakes out a territory of its own -- killing or driving off anyone unrelated -- then coordinates with each other to corner and butcher animals like deer and wild pigs. Unfortunately for the Pelli, they're included on the list of targets if they get caught alone; forays by Lar across the "border" are still common, though the ones nearest Pelli settlements are usually quite wary once they get the measure of their little opponents.

Lar Racial Template   *-55 points*

Attribute Modifiers: ST+2 [20]; DX+1 [10]; IQ-4 [-80]; HT+2 [20]

Advantages: Acute Smell 2 [2] Teeth 1 (Sharp Teeth) [1]

Disadvantages: Bestial [-10]; Intolerance (Total, all non-family members) [-10]; Odious Personal Habit (Eats carrion) [-10]

Note that while individuals vary too much to include them in the template, most of a Lar's -55 points should be spent on hunting and close combat-related advantages and skills. They're profoundly stupid in general, but annoyingly good at killing.

The Town

When the contact team arrives in Gemini-1, the closest settlement of note is Yajnahoh a few miles to the south. It's on the Bay of Naples, on the far northeast shore near the site of Homeline's Pozzuoli. Altogether it has a population of about 5,000, which makes it a good-sized city by this timeline's standards (the largest Pelli settlement, Jatlhiv on Malta, is home to 30,000 people). The whole population fits into a walled semi-circle about a half mile in diameter.

At base, economics and technology dictate what a city is like, and despite its unusual inhabitants Yajnahoh presents a familiar face to human visitors. The climate is dry and the streets dusty with the residues of the mud bricks and stone that make up most buildings. Most of the town is made of are "houses" which are a combination of personal work spaces and shops. This is where an individual Pelli lives while awake. In the center of the city are the dormitories, dozens of longhouses where the Pelli sleep together during the day. They are what defines "clans" of Pelli, units larger than families but smaller than the city as a whole; "guilds" might be a better name, since socializing and education are centered in them during the nights, and this usually dictates who ends up filling what role as adults.

With its excellent harbor, the town is tightly integrated with the maritime economy the Pelli have built throughout the Mediterranean. The shoreline is covered with wharfs and piers. Boats bob in nearby waters bringing in fish and sea food, which supplements the grain grown in the volcanic soils surrounding Yajnahoh. The excess of both are shipped and sold elsewhere. The town is also the major point of exit for the Pelli's other settlements in the area, mostly shipping out timber -- their island possessions are badly deforested these days, so the mainland has an advantage there.

The most unusual thing a Homeline visitor will notice is the quiet. As well as the Pelli not talking nearly as much as humans (cutting down on casual shouting and vendor hawking), the Pelli haven't domesticated horses or cattle so there's not many large vehicles making the rounds. This also helps with sanitation, though Yajnahoh is only less pungent in comparison -- the air is still a bit thick by modern standards.

The other trouble humans will have is entering and getting around the inside of buildings. Doors in Yajnahoh are about five feet tall, and interior ceilings about six. Even if they can stand up completely indoors, the interiors are claustrophobic, and visitors risk braining themselves if they don't watch for variations in height.

People: Hi'o Tovajbogh

"Hikho" (which is about as close as most English speakers can get to the glottal stop in his first name) is a woodsman from north of Yajnahoh. He makes his living by selling logs in town for shipping south, and by killing Lar for the bounties. It's on his loosely defined stomping grounds that the team will first appear in Gemini-1.

He is a typical Pelli, though heavily muscled and very fit by their standards -- regular humans won't notice this naturally though, since they're not used to Pelli norms. They'd figure it out if they could somehow convince him to be examined formally, but his personality makes this impossible. He's very independent, a helpful attitude for someone who lives most of his life away from town, but problematic if he's acting as the interface between other Pelli and the outtime visitors. He is 3'8" tall, weighs 65 pounds, and is covered in short light brown hair everywhere south of his neck except for his palms and the soles of his feet. His bald head is dominated by large brown eyes that are not just relatively larger than a regular human's, but absolutely larger.

His role is to provide an arc for the adventures in this timeline, and a barometer of local feelings towards the visitors. If there's one thing the contact team will have to learn, it's not to think of the Pelli as "good" because the Lar are "bad." Hi'o is the gateway to this state of mind; he's a nice guy in the strong-but-silent mold, and impressively skilled at what he does, and once he gets over his initial suspicions he'll be friendly. But he'll also resent the least little hint of patronizing he detects in the adventurers. He will even get angry whenever he's reminded that the Homeliners are bigger than he is, and more advanced. Over time he will transform into an opponent unless the strange visitors to his land manage by some miracle to treat him exactly correctly all the time. Since the departure point for the trip back to Homeline is his woods, this may become a problem.

Hi'o Tovajbogh   *115 points*

ST 8 [-20]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 12 [20].
Damage 1d-3/1d-2; BL 13 lbs.; HP 8 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 12 [0].
Basic Speed 6 [0]; Basic Move 5 [-5]; Block 0; Dodge 9; Parry 11 (Axe/Mace).

Social Background

TL: 2 [0].
Languages: North (Mainland) Pelli (Native/None) [0].

Advantages

Acute Hearing 1 [2]; Night Vision 4 [4].

Disadvantages

Bad Vision (Dazzled by sunlight) (Glasses) [-5]; Intolerance (Lar) (Total Intolerance) [-10]; Social Stigma (Ignorant) [-5].

Quirks: Doesn't like towns; Hates watching others eat; Laconic; Proud [-4].

Skills

Area Knowledge (Land around Yajnahoh)-15 (IQ+5) [16]; Axe/Mace-16 (DX+4) [16]; Bow-14 (DX+2) [8]; Brawling-13 (DX+1) [2]; Camouflage-16 (IQ+6) [8]; Farming/TL2-11 (IQ+1) [4]; Professional Skill (Fletching)-13 (DX+1) [4]; Professional Skill (Lumberjacking)-16 (DX+4) [16]; Survival (Woodlands)-16 (Per+6) [24].

Adventure Seeds

There, But Not Back Again: A member of the team connected with Dr. Moretti's group tries to hijack the expedition on the trip out to Gemini-1. Using stolen computer time, he's calculated a way to get from one of the intermediate stops to a timeline in the pocket of Centrum. The plan is to sell the EDTO technology to the enemy, then skip to another timeline and disappear.

The attempt will presumably fail due to PC intervention, but even after that the traitor could be a problem. The expedition cannot return to Homeline as they wish, not even for this: they must wait for the travel window to open, and be on Gemini-1 to use it. Can they keep the situation under control for that whole time?

Let's Welcome Our New Guests: The Pelli aren't monolithic. Yajnahoh is the capital of a small kingdom, and if it becomes apparent to other nearby countries that they've got a potential balance-breaker in their midst, things could get very hot for the visitors. Among other things, they'll be targets for kidnapping, for use as bargaining chips, or just to prevent Yajnahoh's king (who lives on the island of Capri, 15 miles south on the other side of the bay) from using them himself.

Swarm: The team have come north of Yajnahoh to the lands still haunted by Lar. Their intention is to see the other intelligent species on Gemini-1, and they get their wish. When the sun comes up and their hosts are just settling down to sleep, the farm on which they are staying is attacked by several family bands of Lar. This is unprecedented -- Lar groups just don't get along.

Once they've managed to drive the attack off, the question becomes "What just happened here?" The only other thing of note that's different is the Homeliners themselves. Is this just a coincidence, or has their presence somehow triggered this uncharacteristic behavior?

Using the Pelli and the Lar In Other Settings

Typical fantasy settings have a built-in entryway for the Pelli. Most have a half-sized, but otherwise human, race of farmers that can be used. There's also a tradition of threatening these pint-sized people with larger, uglier people, but it's worth putting a bit of thought into exactly who these might be in this particular case. It can be a little too easy on the adventurers if the "Lar" are hobgoblins or trolls; consider making them actual Humans if you want to spice up the conflict a little. It can help make their task more difficult if the team might be misidentified by the Pelli.

The Pelli's island homes then make excellent places just off the southern shore of the local Continent of Gaming, where adventurers wash up in one way or another and run inadvertently into the endless war between the little people and their oppressors.

Pulp or, to a lesser extent, modern-day settings can use the Pelli in African adventures. The equatorial rain forests (and this includes southeast Asia as well as Africa) have real-world analogs to the Pelli, humans of short stature who have suffered at the hands of real-world Lar -- if the GM feels like making a point, this can be humans of the European variety as well as locals. For less reflective campaigns, fill the role of the Lar with an invented humanoid ape group instead, then get on with the smashing tales.

For the Pelli themselves, start with a group like Cameroon's Baka. They are less integrated than most pygmies, speaking their own language and lacking contact with the outside world. Emphasize that aspect of their life and it's not a great leap to a completely isolated group with a lost civilization. Stick them on some unexplored branch of the Congo River and it's even possible to save the maritime quality of their civilization.

Using the Pelli in a science fiction game plugs into sci-fi's long history of exploring the contact between human and non-human. There's even a distinct sub-genre where the latter is swapped out for the partially human. For a good modern take on the issue, readers are directed to Lois McMaster Bujold's *Falling Free,* where the imbalance in power and sophistication between the point-of-view character and the pseudo-humans is a key plot thread.

Dork Tower!

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Review

Niagara

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Designed by Thomas Liesching

Game board, 10 wooden canoes and 35 movement chits in five colors, "first player" life preserver, 12 clear plastic river disks, 40 gems in five colors, wooden cloud counter; full-color, boxed, for two to five players; $49.95

The settlers have arrived and are mesmerized by the sight . . . of precious gems. Oh, sure the falls at *Niagara* are nice, too, but there's money to be made out there and that means fighting the river.

The object of the game is to be the first to secure the right combination of gems: one of each of the five colors; four of a kind; or seven of any color.

Each player (two to five can play) gets two canoes and an identical hand of seven small paddle cards. The movement counters are numbered one to six, and the last has a cloud symbol on it. The position of "first player" (signified with a life preserver) is assigned to take the first turn. Everyone places a chit of choice from hand face-down on the board, and the first player reveals his. If it's a number counter, those are his "paddle points" -- the amount of effort his explorer is putting into fighting and searching the rapids. He must put as many of these to use as he can (you can't simply choose not to use points) on the field of play.

The board shows the section of the Niagara River just above its famous falls. It splits at the end, offering two ways to plummet to almost certain doom. The river is peppered with caches of gems in five colors. You have to take these, one per canoe at a time, back up the river and drop them off. You can also steal them from someone else's boat. Once secured upriver, you get to keep that gem -- unless you lose a canoe to the falls and have to buy it back. Going for the rocks near the edge makes it a little easier to reach the "one of everything" victory condition, but it's tough to get that close without the flow of the river carrying you over (or someone pirating your goods on the return trip).

Once everyone has piloted their canoes up and down the river, the waterway carries everything downstream. The lowest number paddle chip played is the river's speed, so for example if you played a three while everyone else played four, the river would shift three spaces. If someone played their cloud counter instead of paddle points, they can adjust the weather track one position this turn, speeding up the river as it swells with rain or slowing it down in the dry season. The river pieces and any boats slide down one side of the fork or the other (and possibly over the falls). Then the first player position rotates left and new counters are played. You have to use all seven tokens before you get them back, so you must choose when to play your big numbers and when you can afford to "coast." The first player to bring a winning selection of gems back across the rope upstream wins the game.

The components in these European style board games are usually pretty impressive, but the river board has outdone itself, at least mechanically. It's a marvel of design that not only lets you push the river disks at one end to have them fall off the edge at the other end, the pieces that fall alternate, ejecting them first from one branch and then from the other (the board sits atop the upturned box halves with the falls flowing over the box). It's like one of those gimmicky toys they create for cereal boxes, only this one really works. The joy ends there, sadly. The artwork is passable, and the board is busy, crowded with game elements (like a place for putting your movement chits). There's some irritating wasted space at the back of the river.

There are other problems, too. Your gem collection is public knowledge, but there's no space for it atop the board.

Putting it on the table below means the box obstructs on all but the largest playing space, and you must crane your neck to see where opponents stand. The gems are colored and very stylish, but in a canoe the conflicting hues make it hard to be certain what color is there without taking it out -- and even just asking may tip someone off you're about to steal their jewels. You're supposed to leave your used counters behind to prevent accidental reuse, but the stacks quickly become unstable and you run the risk of them slipping off the board in an untidy heap. It's easier than it sounds to forget what your play was going to be.

The game play is a little disappointing. Setting aside small, occasionally helpful diagrams and some pesky mistakes in boldface, figuring out a workable strategy upon which to build success is tough. The rules are easy in the broad sense, but there are several small exceptions that crop up to confuse you. Sure, you need X paddle points to row here and grab a gem, but you can't predict what other players will do or how they'll affect the river, so successfully making allowances for the shifting waterway and the possibility of theft seems almost accidental. The recommended age of eight and up suggests *Niagara* may be, by design, more appealing to the younger set, so keep the kids in mind before tendering half a C-note of your own gems.

--Andy Vetromile

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

Icosahedron Adventures

Fighting Feats

by Owen K.C. Stephens

Classes in *d20 System* games that rely on fighting prowess -- but operate in campaigns where magic, psionics, or some other supernatural powers are common -- often suffer a few noteworthy disadvantages. The first is that there is nothing they can do a spell or psychic mantra can't duplicate, but there are lots of things those powers can do the fighters can't touch. The fighter is more durable and reliable in most *d20 System* games, but even that breaks down at upper levels of play. Those character with no access to special sources of power end up facing foes that can avoid them, neutralize them with mental powers, or are immune to damage from mundane sources.

A second common problem is that it's difficult to use the same fighting class to represent both heavily armored knights and more lightly-protected warriors, whether they're bare-chested barbarians or nimble musketeers. Many individual games try to solve this problem by having specialty classes for these roles, but often the result of this is to allow one narrowly defined type of character, not to open a whole range of new, viable character builds.

Finally, fighting-class characters, especially those built with numerous bonus feats, often run out of useful new feats to choose from at mid- and high- levels. While they can always choose broader versatility by specializing in more weapons, this pales in comparison to the mages gaining whole new classes of damaging and reality-shaping spells.

This article is an effort to alleviate all these problems. It does so by presenting a selection of feats for fighting classes. The feats are designed to give fighters more depth in feat selection, including anti-spellcasting feats that require such devotion and conviction against magic they cannot be taken by any character with access to spellcasting (or psionics, or the Mystic Energy of the Universe, or whatever unusual power is tapped by other character in the campaign). While new feats can cause power inflation, or player frustration, these are designed to patch specific holes found in many *d20 System* games. The fact they require a character to spend yet more feats is actually a bonus, as it gives higher-level fighter-type classes a reason to keep taking levels in feat-based classes, rather than gaining some mystic power through multiclassing or some prestige class.

Feat	Prerequisites	Benefit
Acrobatic Dodge	Dex 15+, tumble 6+ ranks	Negate an attack with a tumble check.
Additional Chakra		Gain a magic item slot.
Armor Focus		Reduce your armor check penalty by 2.
Armor Specialization	Armor Focus, fighter level 6	Gain a chance to negate critical hits.
Avoidance	Lightning reflexes, caster 0	Use Reflex rather than Will or Fort.
Danger Sense	Wis 13	Know an action will hurt.
Defensive Shot	Dex 13, Point Blank Shot	Make ranged attacks with no AoO.
Focused Strike	Str 13, Power Attack, caster 0	Strike ignores half hardness.
Force of Will	Iron Will, caster 0	Use Will rather than Fort or Reflex.
Greater Armor Focus	Armor focus, fighter 6	Improve armor check and max Dex by 1.
Greater Armor Specialization	Armor Focus, Armor Specialization, fighter 16.	Increase % chance to negate critical hits.
Greater Improved Initiative	Dex 15, Improved Initiative	Go first.
Greater Targeted	Dex 15, Targeted Strikes, BAB 9+	Reroll 1s and 2s.

Strikes		
Magic Null	Con 15, Magic resistence, toucghness, caster 0	Negate spells of foes that hit you.
Magic Resistence	Toughness, caster 0	Takes 3 less hp from magic attacks.
Mindtrap	Cha 15, caster 0	Harm those that enchant or scry on you.
Resilience	Any 2: Great Fortitude, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Toughness	Reroll one failed save a day.
Skill Specialization	Skill Focus, 36 skill points	Take 10 on Skill Focus skills.
Spider Touched	Wis 13, Climb 8+ ranks	Run along walls.
Targeted Strikes	Dex 15, BAB +6	Reroll 1s on Dex-based weapon attacks.
Tough It Out	Great Fortitude, caster 0	Use Fort rather than Reflex or Will.
Web of Steel I	Dex 13+, Weapon Finesse, BAB 1+	Gain armor bonus from parrying.
Web of Steel II	Web of Steel I	Gain improved armor bonus from parrying.

Acrobatic Dodge [Combat]

Prerequisite: Dex 15+, Tumble 6 ranks.

Benefit: A number of times per day equal to your Dexterity bonus, when you would normally be hit with a melee or ranged attack roll, you may make a DC 20 Tumble check to avoid being hit. You gain a free 5-foot step as part of this Tumble check, and must take it. (If you cannot take your 5-foot step, you cannot use this feat. The movement doesn't count against any other movement you are taking, and does not provoke an attack of opportunity.) You may only use this feat when you have an armor check penalty of 0 or less, are carrying no more than a light load, and are not wielding a two-handed weapon or shield.

Additional Chakra [General]

Choose a magic item chakra

Benefit: You gain one additional chakra of the type chosen. Thus a character that selected the hand chakra could successfully wear and use three magic rings at once, rather than the normal two. Although you have an additional chakra, some magic items may be physically unable to be worn together (for example, it's not reasonable to wear two helmets, or two pairs of boots), while others may incur penalties (a character wearing two cloaks may suffer a -1 armor check penalty).

Special: You may take this feat more than once, adding one new chakra each time. However, you may never more than double the number of chakras at a given location.

Armor Focus [Combat]

Choose one style of armor (such as chain shirt, or banded mail).

Prerequisites: Armor Proficiency with the armor type selected, base attack bonus +1.

Benefit: The armor check penalty of the selected armor type is two less for you (minimum 0). If you take this feat with a Medium or Heavy suit of armor, you can now sleep in it.

Special: You can gain Armor Focus multiple times. Its benefits do not stack. Each time you take the feat, it applies to a new type of armor.

Armor Specialization [Combat]

Choose one style of armor (such as chain shirt, or banded mail) with which you have already taken the Armor Focus feat.

Prerequisites: Armor Proficiency and Armor Focus with the armor type selected, fighter level 6th.

Benefit: When you wear the type of armor selected, you have a chance to negate the additional effects of a critical hit or sneak attack, taking damage (and suffering any additional effects) as if the attack had not been a critical hit or sneak attack. This chance is 20% for light armor, 30% for medium armor, and 40% for heavy armor.

If you have a percent chance to negate critical hits and sneak attacks from some other source (such as the fortitude ability on magic armor) you may add this to the chance gained by use of this feat.

Special: You can gain Armor Specialization multiple times. Its effects do not stack. Each time you take the feat, it applies to a new type of armor.

Avoidance [Combat]

Prerequisite: Lightning Reflexes, caster level 0 or less.

Benefit: Once per round, when targeted by a magic effect that allows a Fortitude save or a Will save, you can instead make a Reflex saving throw.

Special: A character that gains a caster level through class advancement has the choice of forgoing all spellcasting ability to retain the use of this feat. Once made, this choice cannot be changed.

Danger Sense [General]

Prerequisites: Wis 13.

Benefit: Any time you are about to take an action that will immediately result in taking damage (such as setting off a trap or walking into an ambush), you may make a DC 15 Wisdom check. On a successful check, you are aware the action is dangerous, though not precisely where the damage comes from. Additionally, when making a Listen or Spot check to be allowed to act in the surprise round of a combat, you gain a +4 bonus.

Special: A monk may select Danger Sense as a bonus feat at 2nd level, even if she doesn't meet the prerequisites.

Defensive Shot [Combat]

Prerequisites: Dex 13, Dodge, Precise Shot.

Benefit: You do not provoke an attack of opportunity (AoO) for making a ranged attack. (Other actions you take at the same time still provoke AoOs normally.).

Normal: Making a ranged attack normally provokes an attack or opportunity.

Focused Strike [General]

Prerequisite: Str 13, Power Attack, base attack bonus +4, caster level 0 or less.

Benefit: You may make a single focused strike as a full-round action. When you strike at an inanimate object (including an opponent's weapon) in melee, you ignore half of the object's total hardness (round down). Total hardness includes any magical enhancements possessed by the object that increase its hardness.

Special: A character that gains a caster level through class advancement has the choice of forgoing all spellcasting ability to retain the use of this feat. Once made, this choice cannot be changed.

Force Of Will [Combat]

Prerequisite: Iron Will, caster level 0 or less.

Benefit: Once per round, when targeted by a magic effect that allows a Reflex save or a Fortitude save, you can instead make a Will saving throw.

Special: A character that gains a caster level through class advancement has the choice of forgoing all spellcasting ability to retain the use of this feat. Once made, this choice cannot be changed.

Greater Armor Focus [Combat]

Choose one style of armor (such as chain shirt, or banded mail) for which you have already selected the Armor focus feat.

Prerequisites: Armor Proficiency with the armor type selected, base attack bonus +1, Armor Focus with the armor type selected, fighter level 6th.

Benefit: The armor check penalty of the selected armor type is one less for you (minimum 0), Additionally, the max Dex bonus is one higher. These bonuses stack with those gained from the Armor Focus feat.

Special: You can gain Greater Armor Focus multiple times. Its effects do not stack. Each time you take the feat, it applies to a new type of armor.

Greater Armor Specialization [Combat]

Choose one style of armor (such as chain shirt, or banded mail) with which you have already taken the Armor Specialization feat.

Prerequisites: Armor Proficiency, Armor Focus and Armor Specialization with the armor type selected, fighter level 16th.

Benefit: When you wear the type of armor selected, your increase by 20% you chance to negate the additional effects of a critical hit or sneak attack (replacing the bonus from Armor Specialization), taking damage (and suffering any additional effects) as if the attack had not been a critical hit or sneak attack. If you have a percent chance to negate critical hits and sneak attacks from some other source (such as the fortitude ability on magic armor) you may add this to the chance gained by use of this feat.

Special: You can gain Greater Armor Specialization multiple times. Its effects do not stack. Each time you take the feat, it applies to a new type of armor.

Greater Improved Initiative [Combat]

Prerequisites: Dex 15+5, Improved Initiative.

Benefit: You go first in the initiative order. If multiple characters have Greater Improved Initiative, they make normal initiative checks to see what order they go in, and then all character without this feat go after them.

Greater Targeted Strikes [Combat]

Prerequisite: Dex 15, Targeted Strikes, base attack bonus +9.

Benefit: As Targeted Strikes, except you can reroll any natural 1 or 2 on your Dex-based weapons. You must keep the result of the reroll, even if it is another 1 or 2.

Magic Null [General]

Prerequisite: Con 15, Magic Resistance, Toughness, caster level 0 or less.

Benefit: When a foe strikes you in melee combat, one spell the foe has active on him has a chance of being negated. Determine the spell to be effected randomly, and roll 1d20, adding your character level and Constitution modifier. Your foe rolls 1d20 and adds his caster level and spellcasting ability score modifier. If your roll exceed your foes, the spell ends.

Special: A character that gains a caster level through class advancement has the choice of forgoing all spellcasting ability to retain the use of this feat. Once made, this choice cannot be changed.

Magic Resistance [General]

Prerequisite: Toughness, caster level +0 or less.

Benefit: Any time a spell, spell-like ability or supernatural ability deals hit point damage to you, you take 3 points less damage. In addition, when you are hit with ability damage (but not ability drain) from a magic attack, you take 3 points less than you would normally take.

Special: A character that gains a caster level through class advancement has the choice of forgoing all spellcasting ability to retain the use of this feat. Once made, this choice cannot be changed.

Mindtrap [General]

Prerequisite: Cha 15, caster level 0 or less.

Benefit: Whenever you are subject to a mind-affecting or divination effect or spell (regardless of whether the effect is harmful or beneficial to you), the creatures causing the effect must make a Will saving throw against a DC of $10 + \frac{1}{2}$ your character level + your Charisma bonus or take 2d6 points of damage. You gain a +4 bonus to any saving throw against the spell if the spellcaster fails his Will save.

Special: A character that gains a caster level through class advancement has the choice of forgoing all spellcasting ability to retain the use of this feat. Once made, this choice cannot be changed.

Resilience [General]

Prerequisites: Any two of the following feats: Great Fortitude, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Toughness; caster level 0 or less.

Benefit: Once per day, when you fail a saving throw, you may decide to make the saving throw again with a bonus equal to ½ your character level.

Special: A character that gains a caster level through class advancement has the choice of forgoing all spellcasting ability to retain the use of this feat. Once made, this choice cannot be changed.

Skill Specialization [General]

Prerequisites: Skill Focus, 36 skill points

Benefit: When using any skill you have taken the Skill Focus feat with that you may take 10 with under calm circumstances, you may take 10 even if distractions and other circumstances would normally prevent it.

Spider Touched [General]

Prerequisite: Wis 13, 8 ranks Climbing, base attack bonus +3.

Benefit: As long as you are no more than lightly encumbered and suffering an armor check penalty of no more than -1, you can take part of one move action each round to traverse a wall or other relatively smooth vertical surface if you begin and end your move on a horizontal surface. The height you can achieve on the wall is limited only by this movement restriction. If you do not end your move on a horizontal surface, you fall prone, taking falling damage as appropriate for your distance above the ground. Treat the wall as a normal floor for the purpose of measuring your movement. Passing from floor to wall or wall to floor costs no movement; you can change surfaces freely. Opponents on the ground can make attacks of opportunity normally if you leave a threatened space (even if you leave it by running up a wall).

Special: You can take other move actions in conjunction with moving along a wall. For instance, the Spring Attack feat allows you to make an attack from the wall against a foe standing on the ground who is within the area you threaten; however, if you are somehow prevented from completing your move, you fall. Likewise, you could tumble along the wall to avoid attacks of opportunity.

Targeted Strikes [Combat]

Prerequisite: Dex 15, base attack bonus +6.

Benefit: You have deadly accuracy with your agility-based weapon attacks. When dealing damage with a weapon to which you add your Dexterity to your attack rolls (all ranged weapon attacks, and melee weapon attacks made with Weapon Finesse), you can reroll any result of 1 on your weapon's damage dice. Only weapon attacks that require an attack roll benefit from this feat. You must keep the result of the reroll, even if it is another 1.

Tough It Out [General]

Prerequisite: Great Fortitude, caster level 0 or less.

Benefit: Once per round, when targeted by a magic effect that allows a Reflex save or a Will save, you can instead make a Fortitude saving throw.

Special: A character that gains a caster level through class advancement has the choice of forgoing all spellcasting ability to retain the use of this feat. Once made, this choice cannot be changed.

Web Of Steel I [General]

Your fighting style allows you to parry most incoming attacks.

Prerequisites: Dex 13+, Weapon Finesse, BAB +1

Benefit: When you have a weapon to which Weapon Finesse applies in hand, and you are not flat footed, you gain an armor bonus to AC by at least partially parrying all attacks made against you. Since this is an armor bonus, it does not stack with AC bonuses gained by actual armor. The total AC bonus gained is based on your base attack bonus (BAB), as shown on the table below.

Armor	**Armor**

BAB	Bonus	BAB	Bonus
1	3	11	6
2	3	12	6
3	4	13	6
4	4	14	6
5	4	15	7
6	4	16	7
7	5	17	7
8	5	18	7
9	5	19	8
10	5	20	8

Web Of Steel II [General]

Your fighting style allows you to parry most incoming attacks.

Prerequisites: Dex 13+, Weapon Finesse, Web of Steel II, BAB +1

Benefit: As Web of Steel, except the AC bonus applies any time you have a martial weapon you are proficient with in hand, and the AC bonus is derived from the chart below.

BAB	Armor Bonus	BAB	Armor Bonus
1	3	11	7
2	4	12	7
3	4	13	7
4	4	14	8
5	5	15	8
6	5	16	8
7	5	17	9
8	6	18	9
9	6	19	9
10	6	20	10

Aiden the Prophet

for *GURPS*

by Bevan Thomas

Marcus clutched his stomach, grimacing from the pain. The disease continued to ravage his insides, and he was unsure how long until it finally killed him. His friends and family had long since abandoned him, fearing that they too would become infected. Now he had no one, and no hope. Then Marcus heard footsteps coming softly towards him, and he looked up and saw the most beautiful person he had ever seen, a veritable angel of a man clothed simply in a gray robe. The man smiled at Marcus and reached out his hand.

"Be at peace, my son," said the man in a voice that echoed with wisdom and kindness. "And be healed."

Aiden the Prophet is a man of almost celestial beauty. His long golden hair frames his innocent face like a halo, and his blue eyes glimmer with love and compassion. Aidan usually only wears a simply gray robe and sandals, though on him, the clothing looks more royal than the resplendent garments of a king.

Nothing is known of Aiden before he appeared a couple of years ago claiming to be a prophet of a new divinity he refers to only as "the Light." He has wandered from place to place, preaching the "Way of the Light" to all who are willing to hear. This is a religion of complete pacifism, poverty, and abstinence, and Aiden has used his vast charisma to convert many others to his faith. Many people believe Aiden to be a messiah who has been sent by his god to remake the world. Aiden believes that all existing governments and social systems are corrupt, and that those who of the Way of the Light should not follow them, but he also believes that passive resistance is the only acceptable form of rebellion.

Aiden is filled with caring for all living things, and is a strict vegetarian and complete pacifist. He helps all those in need, curing them of their illnesses, granting them divine guidance, and showing them the Way of the Light.

Aiden in a Campaign

Aiden can serve as a useful ally for the player characters, using his powers of healing and prophesy to help them in their time of need. Many characters would be sympathetic to Aiden's mission, and some might even become acolytes. Perhaps a ruler or other powerful individual wishes to gain the goodwill and services of Aiden, and sends the player characters to meet with Aiden and come to an arrangement, or possibly the player characters are disciples who must deal with the emissaries and determine their intent.

Because of Aiden's anti-political and pacifistic stance, as well as his vast charisma, he could present a danger to political leaders, particularly in times of war. After all, if many people decide to practice Aiden's pacifistic stance, then there would be much less soldiers in the army, and if too many people converted to the Light, the dominant religions of the area would likely be angry. Many leaders would attempt to dissuade Aiden from his path, and failing that, banish or kill him. The PCs might have to protect Aiden from attack, or conversely might be the people sent to deal with the Prophet. If the characters' country is currently being under attack by enemy forces, then the players might be in a difficult situation, either allowing Aiden to continue convincing more people to avoid taking up arms in defense of their country or somehow preventing Aiden from getting converts.

If a GM wishes to have a darker interpretation of Aiden and his visions, he may decide that Aiden is somehow being duped, and that the Prophet is actually receiving his power from a malignant or even demonic force. For example, a demon might be manipulating Aiden in order to cause schisms and soften people up for an attack. It is also possible that Aiden himself is lying, and that he is manipulating people for his own gain. Perhaps Aiden is gathering an army of disciples to execute some master plan or simply for the egotistical thrill.

Aiden the Prophet   *218 points*

Attributes: **ST** 8 [-20]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 10 [0]
Will 15 [10]; Per 13 [0]; HP 8 [0]; FP 14 [12]
Base Speed: 5 [0] Basic Move: 5 [0]
Basic Damage: Thrust 1d-3, Swing 1d-2

Advantages: Blessed (very) [20], Charisma 10 [50], Empathy [15], Fearlessness 5 [10], Healing (faith healing +20%)[36], Precognition [25], Reputation 4 (a great healer and man of virtue) [20], Transcendent Appearance (impressive) [20], True Faith [15], Voice [10]

Perks: Honest Face [1], Penetrating Voice [1]

Disadvantages: Charitable [-15], Dead Broke [-25], Disciplines of Faith (asceticism) [-15], Pacifism (total nonviolence)[-30], Sense of Duty (every living being)[-20]

Skills: Detect Lies 16 [4], Diplomacy 29[20], Enthrallment (captivate, persuade, suggest, sway emotions) 26 [32], Esoteric Medicine (the Healing of the Light) 13 [4], Meditation 15 [4], Public Speaking 29 [16], Religious Ritual (the Way of the Light) 13 [4], Survival (plains) 13 [2], Theology (the Way of the Light) 13 [4]

Root For The Underdog: John the Conqueror

"I got a black cat bone,
I got a mojo too,
I got a John the Conquer root,
I'm gonna mess with you,
I'm gonna make all you girls
Lead me by my hand,
Then the world will know
I'm a Hoochie Coochie man."
-- Muddy Waters, "Hoochie Coochie Man" (1954)

If you go into almost any botánica -- a store selling ritual items, herbs, candles, holy cards, and so forth for a primarily Hispanic clientele -- in America, you can have your pick of "High John the Conqueror" related items. Candles, floor wash, incense, scented oil, bath soap, you name it. The floor wash and soap occasionally populate the dustier corners of some neighborhood Rexall's or Walgreen's drugstores, even. And this is true whether the neighborhood and the customers are Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Dominican, or Central American -- or Haitian, or African-American, although then the "botánica" becomes a "candle shop" or "temple shop." High John even shows up in the better class of white "New Age stores," and even, as we've seen, in blues lyrics. In short, John is an American success story. But what, exactly, is it a story about? Let's try to dig around, then, and get to the root of the matter.

"He told me . . . I must go back to Covey; but that before I went, I must go with him into another part of the woods, where there was a certain 'root,' which, if I would take some of it with me, carrying it 'always on my right side,' would render it impossible for Mr. Covey, or any other white man, to whip me. . . . To please him, I at length took the root, and, according to his direction, carried it upon my right side. . . . [Mr. Covey] spoke to me very kindly, bade me drive the pigs from a lot near by, and passed on towards the church. Now, this singular conduct of Mr. Covey really made me begin to think that there was something in the root which Sandy had given me . . . and as it was, I was half inclined to think the 'root' to be something more than I at first had taken it to be."
-- Frederick Douglass, *Narrative Of The Life Of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845)

John isn't excessively formal, it seems, answering to "John de Conquer," "Hi-John," "John de Conker," and "Johnny Conqueroo," just for starters. The New Orleans slang term "Congaroo" (and the weird Delta version "Choncheroe") probably represents a little verbal slippage between the last syllable of "Conqueror" and the word "root," although where John himself leaves off and the root begins (or vice versa) is kind of murky. The great anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston wrote that "it is no accident that High John de Conquer has evaded the ears of white people." Whether it's an accident or not, John does seem to have kept his origins to himself.

The name, and the root, come out of hoodoo, the magical practice of the black South. Although the word "hoodoo" might well be a corruption of "Voodoo," it has also been traced to the word "Judio" (Spanish for "Jewish," also carrying the connotation of something un-Christian). The fact that the word "hoodoo" turns up in white newspapers (and, among other places, the writings of Walt Whitman) makes a Spanish origin more likely than it originally seems, perhaps having entered the white vernacular (meaning "devilish" or "uncanny") via the Southwest. Be that as it may, "hoodoo" was also the most widespread common term used by post-bellum African-American folk magicians for their art, although "conjure" and the more general "rootwork" also had their followers.

In her fascinating book *Spiritual Merchants: Religion, Magic, and Commerce,* Carolyn Morrow Long propounds a fairly convincing origin for High John, beginning with the munkwiza root used in Kongo spirit magic. Kongo slaves (who would have been mostly brought over after the official slave trade ended in 1808) brought their root magic to America, and cast about until they found a suitable substitute. The Frederick Douglass quote above indicates that root magic is known by the 1830s, and adds another circumstantial detail supporting the Kongo -- Douglass elsewhere describes Sandy as "a genuine African" from "the eastern kingdoms." In 1891 a white folklorist describes a root called "Conjure John" (which could easily be a version of "Conquer John"), and in 1899 an anonymous writer informed the

Hampton Folklore Society that "the king root of all the forest is called 'High John the Conqueror.'" The king had revealed himself at the cusp of the century. In 1954 Muddy Waters completed the making manifest by adding a verse to Willie Dixon's "I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man," and the ears of white people were opened.

"High John the Conqueror is one of the most famous of so-called LUCK ROOTS. It is believed by many that a person carrying one of these HIGH JOHN ROOTS in his pocket or on his person will never be without Money and will be very LUCKY and Successful in his undertakings. Many superstitiously think that this strange ROOT acts as a powerful LUCK Charm for Winning Games, Drawing Lucky Numbers and that it Helps in Love Affairs and Drives Away Evil Influences and wards off Bad Luck. However, we make no claims to this effect and sell only as a Curio."
-- advertisement, *King Novelty Curio Catalog* (1936)

Even before his heralds were making straight his path into the worlds of blues and anthropology, John the Conqueror had extended his sway. In some cases, it was enough merely to say his name or recite "John over John" as a protective incantation. By 1930 (and probably considerably before that), his root was the most common conjure ingredient among hoodoo doctors all across the South, and it had spread with the post-Jim Crow Great Migration of blacks to Northern industrial cities. Northern firms like Sovereign Products and the L.W. DeLaurence Company of Chicago (which also published pirated Crowley manuscripts) sold John the Conqueror roots, mojo hands ("High John Conqueror Fixed In Bag"), perfumes, and oils through the mail -- usually with the winking assertion that John's powerful magic was sold "only as a curio." John the Conqueror was on bottles, candles, boxes, and soap. His name turned up in books of conjure magic, often twinned with that of Marie Laveau or King Solomon. If John hadn't already been king, such all-encompassing (and so very American) marketing would have ensured his dominance.

So what does that powerful magic of the king root of all the forest do, then? In early hoodoo, John the Conqueror root seems to have been used, as Frederick Douglass did, mostly for protection. One 1930 Mississippi source describes it as warding off disease "brought on by conjure," and adds that "all witches quake when they see a bit of it in a person's hand." (Note, by the way, that the same root seemingly protects the user from witchcraft and white people.) From this defensive beginning, John's "conquering" nature began to expand -- his root would let you "conquer" an unwilling lover, an unfair court, a card game, or a reluctant employer. Slowly, the overwhelming force of High John turns from conquest to attraction -- as the ad quoted above notes, John's "ROOT" draws love, money, good cards, and luck in general to the user, although it still "Drives Away Evil Influences." Landladies would wash floors with High John the Conqueror Floor Wash to clean up any evil luck that might linger there, and to draw new renters to the room. And, of course, John could draw other power when needed -- like virtually every other important plant (especially one that looked as much like a dark-skinned testicle as John's root) it helped "restore male virtue."

"[T]he meaning of John the Conker has varied with place and time and individuals -- especially in hoodoo shops, where . . . anything available is handed to the customer."
-- Harry Middleton Hyatt, *Hoodoo-Conjuration-Witchcraft-Rootwork* (1970)

So what, precisely, is High John the Conqueror Root? According to a lot of sources, it's St. John's wort *(Hypericum perforatum),* a common plant in European herbalism and witchcraft. (It helps protect against lightning.) However, St. John's wort doesn't actually have a big, hefty "male virtue" root, but a whole wodge of oogy white fibers. Some aspects of St. John's wort -- such as the notion that it is most powerful when picked on St. John's Eve -- made their way into High John's lore, most likely through New Orleans Voodoo circles, where French and African magic blended most thoroughly. Other sources suggest Indian turnip, also known as Jack-in-the-pulpit *(Arisaema triphyllum),* or even tormentil *(Geranium maculatum).* But the current consensus seems to favor the jalap root *(Ipomoea jalapa),* which looks just like it should, and probably became the most common John Conqueroo once mass marketing took over the hoodoo business in the 1920s. The only trouble is that jalap (a relative of the yam) is not native to the South, being a Mexican plant from the state of Jalapa. So the true, original High John Root may still be unknown, or it may grow only in the fields of Doo-Wah-Diddy, the Southern black version of the Big Rock Candy Mountain.

John the Conqueror likewise had a court, if you will, of lesser roots. "Southern John" or "Dixie John" or "Low John" is more in touch with his feminine side, being used for family troubles, love, and childbirth. (Hence, his root is sometimes called "Beth Root.") Southern John is most likely the wake-robin *(Trillium grandiflorum),* but might be the Solomon's seal root *(Polygonatum odoratum).* The obscure North Carolina "Running John" seems to have been a

climbing root, possibly a different variety of Ipomoea or morning-glory; it is a more general luck charm, but also helps make the wearer "irresistible to his lady fair." The galangal *(Alpinia galanga),* a member of the ginger family, is known as "Chewing John" or "Little John to Chew." Unlike High John, which is rubbed or worn, the user actually chews and spits Chewing John for luck in court cases and card games. This practice comes straight out of Kongo, where both nganga and normal folk chewed and spat roots for protection and luck.

"He had come from Africa. He came walking on the waves of sound. Then he took on flesh after he got here. The sea captains of ships knew that they brought slaves in their ships. . . . John de Conquer was walking the very winds that filled the sails of the ships. He followed over them like the albatross."
-- Zora Neale Hurston, "High John de Conquer," *The American Mercury* (Oct 1943)

So, High or Low, Running or Chewing, why John? Or perhaps that should be phrased, John who? There's a big, powerful space in the cantosphere labeled "John," and it gets filled out variously: John the Baptist losing his [(prophesying, wonder-working) head](), the hidden king of Asia [Prester John](), the always-dying ever-living John Barleycorn, John the Son of the Bear in folk tales from Spain to Russia, and Johnnie Armstrong who faces down the king of Scotland. And there are plenty of American Johns from Johnny Appleseed (again with the plants) to John Hardy (a bad man of the ballads) to John Wesley Hardin (an even worse man of the ballads) to John Henry, the Steel-Drivin' Man, who really ought to get a whole column to himself one of these days. Zora Neale Hurston identifies John de Conquer with "Old John," a kind of Br'er Rabbit crossed with Batman for the slaves of the old South. He has much in common with the "Jack" of Appalachian folk tales, who is himself the Jack of Beanstalk, Giant-Killing, and similar fairy tale fame. Indeed, conjure hands are often called "jacks," and a mojo jack might well have a hard core of High John.

"High John" would also be Tidewater slang for "conjuring John," raising the possibility that the original John de Conquer was a famous conjure man named John. (The musician Doctor John named himself after just such a famous New Orleans Voodoo priest, a rival of Marie Laveau.) Indeed, one such hoodoo doctor lived on Deal Island, Maryland, but in the 1930s, too late to be the original. (Unless, of course, he was [immortal](). Just sayin'.) This would imply that John came over with the earliest slaves, not the Kongo late-arrivals -- "John" could be an Anglicization of "Ogoun," the West African god (and later Voudun loa) associated with fire, metals, and war. For extra points, Ogoun is also identified with St. John the Baptist, whose wort we discussed earlier. However, our hoodoo Johnny Conquer has as much in common with Legba (who governs chance and [Robert *John*son's]() crossroads) and Shango (who governs virility) as he does Ogoun, so perhaps we should look further.

"These young Negroes reads they books and talk about the war freeing the Negroes, but Aye, Lord! A heap sees, but a few knows. 'Course, the war was a lot of help, but how come the war took place? They think they knows, but they don't. John de Conquer had done put it into the white folks . . ."
-- Shady Anne Sutton, quoted by Zora Neale Hurston in "High John de Conquer" (1943)

In Kongo root magic, each root contains a spirit. These are not individuals, necessarily, but fractal aspects of a larger spirit. (The munkwiza root I mentioned earlier contained the royal spirit.) In the same fashion, a pack of "jacks" might add up to a single King, to wit High John the Conqueror. Just as John de Conquer assembles his persona from Old John, Ogoun, John the Baptist, and possibly Doctor John the Conjure of New Orleans, so too perhaps he draws on the bilongo -- the spiritual "medicine" -- of many different plants. The Iroquois, for example, reverenced a cousin of the jalap, the bush morning-glory *(Ipomoea leptophylla),* as Man Root or Man In The Earth. They rubbed it for hunting luck, carried it for strength and endurance, and burned it to see visions in its smoke. Likewise, the Aztecs and other Mexican tribes used a mysterious plant called Ololiuqui to "communicate with the devil . . . who resides in the seeds," as the disapproving Spanish put it. A 16th-century painting of Ololiuqui shows a big jalap-looking root on the bottom, leading botanists to identify it as the morning glory, or Ipomoea violacea, which as it happens contains a goodish bit of lysergic acid in its seeds. Which seeds, as it happens, the Aztecs called *Tlitliltzin,* or "King Black."

So John is the King Black, the Man In The Earth, the American [Mandrake](). He comes out of the roiling time-lost [Congo]() and draws on the robes of King Solomon feared by demons and of the most powerful King in America, the King on a pack of cards. (Virtually all depictions of John show him as a crowned white king with a neat beard. John can "pass.") And when he has come into his power, he enters the hand of Frederick Douglass, and inspires him to

resist his master Mr. Covey. Three days (!!) after putting the root in his pocket, Douglass fights back for the first time. He beats Covey and another white man, and that victory was what Douglass called "the turning point in my career as a slave." He resolved to be a free man, whatever it took, and won his freedom and eventually the freedom of four million fellow Americans. High John had conquered. So don't rub him the wrong way.

Random Thoughts On . . . McGuffins

Big changes are coming up at Stately Marsh Manor. We're going to be moving from our happy home (well, dumpy apartment) at the end of July, moving from outside of Philadelphia to outside Indianapolis.

Our primary reason for doing so is looking toward the future. The Midwest is interesting because, when they designed it, they included lots of space. When they invented the East Coast, they forgot that people would want to build reasonably sized affordable houses a few hundred years later. While this is a glaring oversight on their part, to be sure, it's no more egregious than the developer who put a two-decade gap between men and women's sexual peaks.

Anyway, I find myself in need of a buffer of some columns, so I'm going to try an experiment. Basically, I'm going to forgo the usual well-thought-out and planned format of my column (HAH!), and instead try a more stream of consciousness approach. The basic idea here is that I'll be writing for about an hour on a topic, probably using a more bullet-point approach. This "Random Thoughts On" series will hopefully prove interesting for you while also giving me the extra time necessary to pack up our worldly belongings and sort them to a point where they'll fit into a 26-foot truck, despite needing two 26-foot trucks to get all our stuff together in the first place.

This week's random thoughts are on McGuffins -- the plot point element that people pursue. The stereotypical -- indeed, classic -- example is the Maltese Falcon, from the book (and movie) of the same name. It doesn't matter *why* people want the Maltese Falcon, so long as it provides the motivating force behind the action.

The problem with most McGuffins, in an RPG standpoint, is that they are usually required (or thought to require) some ability or reward; after all, what's the point of tracking down, say, the Ark of the Covenant if it's just a box that sits there?

In most gaming adventures, the McGuffin translates most purely into the Orb of Power, the purpose of which is normally to thwart some great plot that only the Orb can cure. (The closest analogy I can think of is *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom,* where the theft of the Stones of Whatchimacallit led to the famine and despair of the surrounding towns.)

The problem with this approach is that is can seem awfully transparent. After all, why doesn't the Orb of Power have any use once the great plot is undone? Why do all the McGuffins so accumulated disappear in a puff of light at the end of the adventure? Why isn't any other solution possible to thwart the great plot?

There are any number of ways that the concept of the McGuffin can be tweaked to provide better (or at least different) possibilities. At random:

The McGuffin can be a person, sentient, a living thing, or so on. (I think this was the broad plot of the two-hour music video called *The Fifth Element.*) Living things have their own wants and desires. They need to be fed. They can wander off. They can be hurt or even die. There can be a bond that forms between the McGuffin and the PCs, which can lead to their own complications. (For example, what if means of developing the serum necessary to save a colony planet can only be devised from this one animal that had somehow developed mutant antibodies, but the animal had to be killed? Can the heroes accept this choice, even if it looks like a kitten and has survived with the party through firefights, space battles, and explosions?)

The McGuffin can be a place or an unmoving object. One of the broad assumptions of many McGuffins is that they can be picked up and carried around, and the interplay of what happens with the McGuffin as it falls into various hands (or fails to do so). But what if the McGuffin isn't a thing, but a place? For example, what if the McGuffin of the dungeon is that there's only one certain room in the whole labyrinth where the six-hour Ritual of World-Saving can be done? More interestingly, what if that room is, say, one-third of the way into the dungeon? Then the rest of the adventure would either force the heroes to clear out the rest of the dungeon to make the area secure, or -- if time is of the essence -- turn into something of an inverted dungeon crawl as they figure out how to secure the dungeon from two directions: the passageways from which they just came (especially if other forces had followed the adventurers

into the dungeon to thwart the ritual), and deeper within as they respond the ruckus above. (This option would probably be best-suited for lower-powered characters, who wouldn't be as likely to simply seal off the rest of the dungeon with a spell or two.)

The McGuffin has multiple uses, which might cause the conflict in the first place. One common presumption with most plot devices is that they have only one use, the antithesis of which is the avoidance of that use. (The Maltese Falcon is worth money; the Ark of the Covenant can be used as a weapon, or kept out of the hands of those who would use it as a weapon; and so on.) However, there's no good reason for this to be the case. For example, consider if the McGuffin was one of the last of a rare animal species (a pregnant specimen, no less) that can be killed to extract the juice from its gland and grant immortality. The heroes might be charged by a conservation group to protect the creature, while being attacked by another group. (The organization may or may not tell the heroes about the creature's special ability; if the heroes find out during the course of such an adventure, would they succumb to the temptation to sacrifice the critter themselves?)

And, of course, objects can have even *more* uses; a giant diamond would be a source of wealth, a possible focus for a weapon, the means of trapping an interdimensional entity, a snazzy paperweight for a giant . . .

The McGuffin may not be what it seems. If the McGuffin has other uses, it's possible that the heroes can acquire it for one reason and be unaware of its other purposes. As an example, the One True Ring could easily be mistaken for a mere ring of invisibility; if a group of heroes were to stumble across it, they may become embroiled in an epic tale without knowing why. ("Why are these ghoul-things attacking us mercilessly? Why is the landscape all bleak? And why is our halfling bugging out?!")

Or suppose that a brazier has the property that it gets heavier and heavier as the days go by? Oh, and it's also the necessary element for a dark ritual. Then you might have the situation where the heroes acquire it, get tired of its weight, dump it somewhere, depart, and then need to turn around and go back, only to defend it as an unmovable object (above).

As one other possibility in this type of McGuffin -- and at the risk of including a spoiler for an over-two-decade-old product -- the MythAdventures-based scenario from the old *Wizards* book from Mayfair's Role-Aids line had the heroes tracking down a great magical flying device. The heroes find a large chariot that registers as magical in the center of a dungeon, with icons of winged creatures and the like on it; unfortunately, it's too large for the heroes to take it back the way they came, so they need to lug this giant thing through the rest of the construct, which of course is rife with complications. When they get to the end, they are thanked for their efforts at acquiring the flying carpet that was tucked into the chariot -- a carpet which is, of course, easily foldable and carriable -- but are asked why they bothered dragging around the mundane dusty monstrosity. (Big laffs . . . GM hides.)

There is little as tangibly useful in starting a plot and keeping it going (especially for a group of characters) than the McGuffin. With a little thought it's possible to turn even the most hackneyed and common of concepts into something you can sink your teeth into . . . before they're knocked out by artifact-hunting Nazis, that is.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Game Master's Pack (for [Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay](#))

Developed by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Published by [Black Industries](#)

Designed & Written by Alfred Nuñez, Jr. & Chris Pramas

Cover by Geoff Taylor

Screen Art by David Griffith, Karl Kopinski, Torstein Norstrand, & Geoff Taylor

Interior Art by Dave Andrews, Dave Gallagher, Tony Parker, & Scott Purdy

Cartography by Dave Andrews & Shawn Brown

Four-panel screen in landscape format, cover/map sheet, & 32-page saddlestitched booklet; $14.99

There comes a time when every game gets a screen, but the problem with any such item is not the useful bits of cardboard reprinting all of those handy tables, but what comes with it. Does it come with an equally handy booklet of further references that adds something to the game? Or a scenario that, once run, goes back on the shelf? Further there have been screens, and there have been *screens;* right at the top for sheer quality in terms of quality and quantity of information is ***The Sholari's Pack*** for ***SkyRealms of Jorune.*** This is followed by the ***GM Screen*** published by Hogshead Publishing for the first edition of ***Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay;*** while the screens for both ***Shadowrun*** and ***SLA Industries*** are examples of this object.

So if the screen for the original ***Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*** was good, how does it compare with the ***Game Master's Pack*** for the best-selling second edition of the game? The pack includes a cover sheet with a reasonable map of the Empire and her neighbors on its reverse, a 32-page book containing an all-new scenario along with various bits and pieces, plus the screen itself.

Starting with the cover sheet, the map is at least handy, but why not print it in color and with more detail? Further, as a single, flimsy sheet, it is going to get lost all too easily. The screen comes in landscape format, the front decorated with cover artwork from various Black Industries books, along with a pair of comments about the Empire. The tables inside are tightly laid out, but are easy to use in play. From left to right, they include the tables for Chaos Manifestation for when magic goes awry; weaponry, combat actions, critical hits and hit locations; movement, illumination, skill types and modifications, and falling damage. All are easy to read, although they lack page references for the core book they are taken from. Some of these tables could have been repeated on the front cover for player reference so as to ease play, but the real problem with the screen is its relative flimsiness. In comparison, Hogshead Publishing's ***WFRP*** screen was the Great Wall of China, being of thick, durable card, and capable of withstanding plenty of punishment.

Alfred Nuñez, Jr.'s scenario, which takes up roughly half of the booklet, dominates the booklet. The remainder details several buildings common to the Empire -- a coaching inn, toll houses, a lock keeper's house, a village, and a farmstead. Long-time fans of the game will recognize these plans from Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay's first edition rulebook, and their inclusion here is an indication of just how good the cartography is. Their immediate utility is enhanced because the booklet's scenarios make use of the plans. The booklet also includes an NPC record sheet and a combat tracking sheet; as well as reprinting more tables from the rulebook which list equipment, and also the effects of delving into dark lore. Overall, pretty useful stuff, and much easier to find than leafing through the rulebook.

Which just leaves the scenario. Penned by the author of *Dwarfs: Stone and Steel* for the first edition of the game, it is designed to introduce new players to the campaign world. Set in the South of the Empire, along the border between the provinces of Talabecland and Stirland in the Great Forest, this is an area rife with banditry and rivalries between various minor noble houses. "Pretty Things" can be run before the scenario "Through the Drakwald," found in the rulebook, and needs to be run with a minimum of four characters, a pre-generated quartet being provided. It opens with the four at a coaching inn, local gossip concentrating upon the arrest of an infamous bandit. The man in gaol though, claims to be innocent, the arresting bounty hunter having got the wrong person. Will the player characters believe him or not? And if so, will they go to his aid? This is only the start of an adventure that sees the party encounter more bandits, slaughter, greenskins (Goblins), and the plight of a noble heir.

"Pretty Things" gives the players plenty to do, and manages to hide its simple and linear nature well. It introduces several elements particular to the Old World (in particular how unfair it can be), but best of all, it does so without resorting to the all pervading threat from Chaos. Indeed, nary a Chaos cultist in sight! In comparison with the scenario found in the rulebook, which is both linear and singular in nature, I do wish that I'd had "Pretty Things" in hand prior to running scenario "Through the Drakwald."

Overall, the *Game Master's Pack* is a decent package after counting up the plus and minuses. On the plus side, the screen is useful, but on the down side, it is flimsy. On the plus side, "Pretty Things" is more than decent scenario, but on the down side, it takes up almost half of the booklet. On the plus side, the reprinting of the tables are useful, but on the down side, surely there was more reference material that could have gone into the book. Yet, the pluses do outweigh the minuses, and "Pretty Things" is actually a much better scenario than several of those that were included in *Plundered Vaults,* the anthology of adventures old and new for *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay.* To be fair, Pretty Things" is neither spectacular nor outstanding, but in comparison, it is more intelligent, mature adventure than has been published for the game to date, and its like is one that fans of the game deserve to have. The end result is that for the *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* GM, the package represented by *Game Master's Pack* is worth having to hand.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Space 1889: The Lunar Inheritance

Published by [Noise Monster Productions](#)

Written by Richard Dinnick & Andy Frankham

Directed by John Ainsworth

Starring Neville Watchurst (Captain Nathaniel Blake), Jack Galagher (Mr. William Brooker), Helen Goldwyn (Miss Annabelle Somerset), Max Bolinger (Colonel Molokov), Jason Mitchell (Lieutenant Matheson) with Nicholas Briggs (K'chuk/Jank) & Garrick Hagon (Doctor Cyrus Grant)

65-minute audio drama; $22

The destination for *The Arina Stone Trilogy,* the series of audio dramas published by Noise Monster Productions and set in the milieu of *Space 1889,* was Mars. Over the course of three adventures the listener heard the last few hours of the doomed ether liner, *HMS Perbindesh,* thrilled to journeys along the Red Planet's canals and chases out into her deserts, and learned of the fate of the city-state of Alclyon. With high production values and excellent performances, the trilogy superbly brought both the setting of the game and the attitudes of the period to life and to the ear. With that trilogy complete, Noise Monster Productions' fourth audio drama set in the worlds of *Space 1889* brings us much closer to home.

As the title suggests, *The Lunar Inheritance* is set on and in the Moon. It is more obviously inspired by H.G. Wells than the Edgar Rice Burroughs of the previous three CDs and it is also draws very heavily and far more obviously upon the roleplaying game than does *The Arina Stone Trilogy. The Lunar Inheritance* is a sequel to two *Space 1889* adventures. The first inspiration adventure is "On Gossamer Wings" from the core *Space 1889* rulebook, in which the adventurers join the American inventor Doctor Cyrus Grant in testing out a new device -- the "Ether Propeller Governor" -- that will make journeys to the Moon much, *much* easier, and after crashing discover the fate of a lost Russian expedition. The second is "River of Life," which appears in the scenario anthology *Tales From The Ether* and is also a sequel to "On Gossamer Wings." Once again, the adventurers find themselves on the way to the Moon, this time at the urging of Annabelle Somerset, the young niece and ward of Doctor Grant. He has disappeared, and in order to affect a rescue, the adventurers must penetrate deep into the Selenite core where they will uncover a strange new race and its fantastic science. Both Doctor Grant and Annabelle Somerset appear in *The Lunar Inheritance,* as do other signature characters from the game.

As *The Lunar Inheritance* opens, someone else is coming to the rescue of Doctor Grant a second time. The British government has an interest in the good Doctor's work and also in monitoring the activities of the Russians in the Lunar environs. *HMS The Indomitable,* the Royal Navy's latest ether ship, commanded by Captain Nathaniel Blake, has been ordered to respond to the Doctor's distress call, which also warns of "space lightning." Also aboard is Mr. William Brooker, a former associate of Doctor Grant who has an understanding of the Doctor's inventions and happened to part company from him following a personal disagreement.

Within moments of coming upon the Moon's dark side, *The Indomitable* is struck by the mysterious lightning and is forced to land on the lunar surface. While her crew repairs the vessel, the Captain and Mr. Brooker leave the ship and

make their way to the Great Canyon known to lead into the Moon to where the insectoid Selenites live, and far below that to where the Moon Men live in their City of Light and Science. It is quickly apparent that the Russians have made great strides. Not only have they installed a lightning gun capable of disabling an ether ship of war, but also a massive elevator that enables them to descend and ascend the chasm with ease and in comfort. In keeping with the then-nature of Tsarist society, the Russian military has enslaved the Selenites into a caste of new lunar serfdom. Blake and Brooker also make contact with Miss. Annabelle Somerset and K'chuk, the insectoid Selenite first seen in "On Gossamer Wings." It is clear that the relationship between Miss. Somerset and Mr. Brooker is strained for reasons unspoken, but together the quartet decides upon a plan. Splitting their forces, Miss. Somerset and Mr. Brooker will disable the Russian lightning gun and after collecting the "Ether Propeller Governor" from her uncle's downed vessel, will install it aboard *The Indomitable,* enabling the ship to enter the Canyon. Meanwhile, Captain Blake and K'chuk will ride the Russian elevator and find their way to the City of Light and Science not only to find Doctor Grant, but also to determine the nature of the links forged between the Russians and the Moon Men.

In comparison with *The Arina Stone Trilogy, The Lunar Inheritance* is a far simpler, more direct tale. Less character driven, much more of an adventure tale, this installment moves heavily into the Pulp mode. Advance the events four decades into the 1930s, substitute the Nazis for the Russians and the Tsarist heavy machinery with Aryan super science and the seams would hardly show. Or, indeed, advance it another two decades into the 1950s, and substitute Communist and Soviet as necessary.

What suffers, then, in this audio drama is the characterization. True, there is not the time to develop the characters in *The Lunar Inheritance* as there is in *The Arina Stone Trilogy,* but the actors must work hard to overcome the stereotypes present in the script. All approach this tale with gusto and it cannot be denied that they give it their best. It is unfortunate that the part of Mr. William Brooker feels flat and underwritten, but then there were characters in the early part of *The Arina Stone Trilogy* that felt as weak but were given room to breathe and develop later on. One character unlikely to receive this room is Colonel Molokov, played by Max Bolinger. Thankfully, never reaching the depths of the moustache-twirling villain, Molokov is rarely more than the one-note military officer loyal to the Tsar.

Two performances do stand out, though. The first is that of Nicholas Briggs as the Selenite K'chuk (he also undertakes the role of Jank, the leader of the Moon Men), his long experience as the voice of the Daleks -- including on the recent revived *Dr. Who* television series -- stands him in good stead. Although electronically aided, Briggs' diction perfectly captures how you feel that the alien Selenite should speak. The other is Garrick Hagon as the slightly deranged not-quite-a-mad-scientist Doctor Cyrus Grant. Probably best known for playing *Star Wars'* Biggs Darklighter, Hagon is a veteran of several audio dramas, with his Doctor Grant being the bullish counterpart to the reserve of both Captain Blake and Mr. Brooker.

The production values for *The Lunar Inheritance* are as good as the listener has come to expect. In particular, every effort has been made with the sound effects and incidental music to emphasize the all-too-alien nature of the sub-selenite world. The incidental music plays a relatively role compared to the previous trilogy, where it was occasionally a touch tinny. Nevertheless, the overall sound quality of the drama is superb. As before, the CD is packaged with a nice little booklet detailing some elements found within the story. Similarly, it leaves the reader wanting more information.

Ultimately, the truth is that *The Lunar Inheritance* is just not as good as *The Arina Stone Trilogy.* It lacks the depth and thoughtfulness, and listeners coming from the first three to this drama wanting more of either will probably be disappointed. This isn't entirely fair, because if you step back and approach this drama as a straight adventure tale, then *The Lunar Inheritance* is still an entertaining affair. It is also a good listen, one that brings to life several of the **Space 1889's** signature characters.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Interview

Simon Rogers of ProFantasy Software

Interview by Steven Marsh

For over a decade, there has been one name practically synonymous with RPG map-making programs: ProFantasy Software. Their software product line, *Campaign Cartographer,* has seen several major releases, numerous add-ons, and thousands of maps. Now, with the full release of *Campaign Cartographer 3* looming large in the near-future, we took a few minutes to chat with Simon Rogers.

* * *

Pyramid: **Before we get into the meat of the interview . . . Simon, you've been with ProFantasy Software for many years now. What's your role at the company?**

Simon: ProFantasy's management structure is like an ettin's heads; Mark Fulford and I desperately try to control the company's lurching body and chastise freelancers with our big metaphorical club. All of the other work is done by long-term freelancers scattered around the world in Sweden, the continental U.S., the U.K., Germany, Australia, and even Hawaii.

Pyramid: **Fair enough. So, it's been a busy 12 months (give or take) for ProFantasy Software; last GenCon saw the release of the massive *Tome of Ultimate Mapping* in hardcover and PDF formats; *Temples, Tombs and Catacombs!* came out last October, and *Campaign Cartographer 3* looks to be coming any day now; have I got everything right?**

Simon: Almost. We've released the early adopter version of *Campaign Cartographer 3,* with an eye toward a full release at Origins 2006. *Campaign Cartographer 3* was a glint in our eyes back in 2001, when Peter Olsson, our lead programmer came up with a way of adding effects and bitmaps to CC.

Pyramid: **If I'm remembering correctly, the original *Campaign Cartographer* was designed for DOS-based computer systems, while *Campaign Cartographer 2* and *Campaign Cartographer 2 Pro (CC2 Pro)* were designed for Windows 95 systems. Can you provide a bit of overview as to what systems *Campaign Cartographer 3* is designed for?**

Simon: *Campaign Cartographer* for DOS was launched at GenCon UK in 1993; it fit on a single floppy disk and was based on FastCAD DOS. We skipped Windows 3.1 and went straight for Windows 95 to make *Campaign Cartographer 2* in 1997. *CC2 Pro* was launched in 2002 and should really have been called *Camptaign Cartographer 3* in retrospect -- the improvements were immense, although both were based on the same CAD engine.

Campaign Cartographer 3 is a very different beast, and will make use extensive use of system resources where they are offered up for use, massively increasing speed. The basic system requirements are any system which runs Windows 2000 or better, although we've had no problems running it under Windows 98. Disk space requirements are 350MB and a recommended minimum of 256MB memory.

Pyramid: **Since a lot of our readers are fans of non-Microsoft platforms, do you know if users will have any luck running *Campaign Cartographer 3* on alternate systems (Linux with WINE, VirtualPC, or the like)?**

Simon: This has not been tested, I'm afraid. My guess is that *Campaign Cartographer 3* will be less likely to run on these systems than previous systems.

Pyramid: **How come?**

Simon: Like its predecessors, *Campaign Cartographer 3* is written in assembly code. We are pretty confident that it is the fastest PC-based software in the world for handling multiple large images. Assembly code means no cross-platform compatibility. Rewriting it for the Mac is beyond our means and would not make commercial sense -- it's not *Doom 3,* regrettably. The only bone I can throw to non-PC users is that Mike Riddle of FastCAD is working on multi-functional cross-platform software which would form the core of a new version in the future.

Pyramid: **It seems that ProFantasy Software reserves full version-number changes for huge leaps forward in technology for the series; the leap from the original *Campaign Cartographer* to *Campaign Cartographer 2,* for example, exemplified the growing pains from DOS to Windows, permitting many more font options, ease of printing, differences in window sizes and hardware, and so on. What's new and exciting about *Campaign Cartographer 3?* What's the "big draw"?**

Simon: Yes, we give out many substantial improvements free and have big gaps between versions -- not just bug fixes. *CC2 Pro,* for example, has had eight universal updates.

In short, *Campaign Cartographer 3* allows you to create more beautiful maps with special effects in many different styles, more quickly and easily, while maintaining the product line's signature power and functionality. It includes an attractive new set of art in PNG format created by Dave Allsop (who's worked on *SLA Industries* and the *Book of Unremitting Horror*). I'm afraid words aren't the best medium to demonstrate what is possible.

Pyramid: **That's okay; we can include screenshots.** *[See below]*

Simon: *Campaign Cartographer 3* gives much of the power of very high end graphics software, but at an incredible speed in comparison. We've created an optional simple interface for new users, and the software does a lot more hand-holding, while allowing power users to do what they have always done.

The style elements of *Campaign Cartographer 3* allow our master mappers to create sets of drawing tools, symbols, and templates so that others can make maps in any style they can imagine, rather than painstakingly following the masters' suggestions. If you want a photorealistic floorplan, a pencil-sketched dungeon, a blue print or clean-looking modern map, style packs will enable you to do this.

Campaign Cartographer 3 also allows you to use the vast selection of art available on line, and in particular the excellent art resources collected and collated by the GM Syndicate. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all the many art contributors for their selfless efforts. GM Syndicate is making it easy for *Campaign Cartographer 3* users to add their art to the maps. Expect to see *Campaign Cartographer 3*-ready symbol catalogs over the next few weeks.

Pyramid: **Can you give some examples as to the "hand-holding" that the simple interface does?**

Simon: The simple interface consists of a single toolbar which allows you to do almost everything a new user requires, and most of what advanced users need. Working from the left of the toolbar you select drawing tools will build up your map with land, rivers, roads, etc, add symbols and you have the editing tools you need to change them. Many of the icons are familiar already from other Windows software, so the learning curve is substantially reduced.

Pyramid: **Tell us a bit about how the new version was developed. What's "under the hood"?**

Simon: All our software makes use of a core CAD engine called FastCAD written by Mike Riddle, the original creator of AutoCAD. We've worked with him to make changes in the engine over the years, but the majority of the code is written by Peter Olsson, who is the quickest, most adaptable programmer I know. *Campaign Cartographer 3* is very different developmentally, because it uses a special custom-written version of FastCAD, with totally rewritten display routines.

Campaign Cartographer 3 was conceived based on users suggestions on our excellent mail list, and by a bit of code Peter Olsson, our senior developer wrote in his spare time back in 2002, I think it was. He worked out a way to add effects and artwork to drawings, and these enhanced the final appearance no end. However, at the time the FastCAD engine could not reliably cope with the challenges he set. We approached Mike Riddle of FastCAD with our

requirements. It took three complete rewrites of the core display engine before we were all happy with the end result, and Mike had to custom-write all the display routines, because the standard Microsoft tools weren't fast, attractive, or flexible enough. We decided that ease of coding was less important than ease of use. So, even the *Campaign Cartographer 3* core was written especially for us. Peter and I worked intensively on his code, adding the new features; and Joe Slayton, who programmed *Fractal Terrains,* created many of the effects.

Pyramid: **For those unfamiliar with *Campaign Cartographer,* can you give an overview of the process of using the software to make maps? Is it like a "paint" program, an illustrator program, or what? How much does the user need to know before starting a new map?**

Simon: *Campaign Cartographer 3* takes you through the initial process of creating a new map with a wizard, letting you choose a look for your map before you even get started, as well as setting out the size and any map furniture.

Then you use set of draw tool buttons to add features to the map. Their appearance depends on the current drawing style. For example, if you added forest, you might see a bunch of little trees, a texture, or even a tree-like scribble depending on the style. On a floorplan, draw tools can add rooms or caves to the map.

After this you select smart symbols from the symbols catalogs. Symbols are "smart" because they react appropriately according to their type -- you can click on a tree symbol and it will select randomly from the list, a door will align itself to a wall and cut a hole, or you could select a rail symbol and start drawing a railway network with bends and end pieces. After this you add text labels and a hex or square grid.

Finally, you can add effects. This is what gives your drawing the professional touch. Each draw tool adds to its own sheet in the drawing, and each sheet can have multiple effects. You might add a shadow and a bevel to the walls, an inner glow on the floor, and an outline to make the text stand out.

Pyramid: **Can you give any idea about how long it takes to make a map, either when you're just starting out or when you know what you're doing? (Obviously it depends on the quality and complexity of the map . . . But, as an example, how much time would it take -- once you're up to speed -- to generate something like this one** *[See Illustration 1]***?)**

Simon: That took about half an hour of drawing (at this stage the map was ready), then at least another half an hour with me fiddling with effects until it looked just right. This one *[See Illustration 2]*, by contrast, took about 10 minutes, as I saved the effects

Illustration 1
Click for larger image

setting from the first map and reused them. A complex overland map can take many hours, and be built up as the campaign progresses.

It's actually developing new styles of maps which takes time (and relatively advanced knowledge) but *Campaign Cartographer 3* enables advanced users to create style packs incorporating the techniques they have developed into drawing tools, textures, and templates.

Pyramid: **Does the release of *Campaign Cartographer 3* mark the end of support**

Illustration 2
Click for larger image

and expansion of the Campaign Cartographer 2 line?

Simon: We have one more *CC2 Pro*-compatible product to release: *Source Maps: Cities* -- twelve real-world cities with stats, images and maps, populated for a number of different game systems and supported online by a forum. We will continue to offer technical support for previous versions.

Pyramid: **How compatible is** *Campaign Cartographer 3* **with the old line? Is the** *Tome of Ultimate Mapping* **still applicable? Are any of the other add-ons usable with the new version? That sort of thing . . .**

Simon: In a process that will take a couple of months, we are updating all our add-ons so that they work with *Campaign Cartographer 3.* When this process is complete, *Campaign Cartographer 3* and the *Campaign Cartographer 3* upgrade will automatically update any *CC2 Pro* add-ons for compatibility with *Campaign Cartographer 3.* In the transitional period, people can work with *CC2 Pro* and *Campaign Cartographer 3* side by side.

The only thing that won't be included with the *Campaign Cartographer 3* update is new artwork for the add-ons -- we are releasing art packs for add-ons, starting with *Dungeon Designer.* These will be available at additional cost to existing add-on users, but will be included in the add-ons after their release. Any purchase of an add-on from now will include a one-year upgrade insurance guarantee, so that if we release any art, they will get it.

The *Tome of Ultimate Mapping* will still be useful, but slightly redundant. We will be releasing a special *Campaign Cartographer 3* supplement free for existing users of the book, and when we finally re-release the *Tome of Ultimate Mapping* for version 3, users who purchased the *Tome* after the release of *Campaign Cartographer 3* well get a free updated PDF.

Pyramid: **So they won't need to buy the book twice to get the new information, eh? ProFantasy Software has always seemed to go out of its way to ensure that existing users are well taken care of; for example, I remember the utilities that enabled me to convert the old** *Campaign Cartographer* **for DOS symbols to the new** *Campaign Cartographer 2* **format, and I loved the "magazine"-like electronic issues that -- if I recall correctly -- were released around the early days of** *Campaign Cartographer 2.* **Do you have any thoughts on ProFantasy's commitment to customers? Is this something ProFantasy feels they need to do to remain competitive, a desire to foster loyalty, or some other philosophy at ProFantasy?**

Simon: Thank you. I do think we give good customer service -- it's something on which we pride ourselves. That means replying quickly to emails so that you don't have to spend more time down the line dealing with a worse problem, contacting customers preemptively if there are foreseeable problems, changing our minds when we are wrong about something, and looking after existing customers with free updates and fair upgrade prices, as well as retrospective discounts or free copies for people who buy near a version break.

It's partly a matter of pride. I don't want to work for a company that gives poor customer service and tech support. I've been on the receiving end often enough, and I think you have to lack self-respect if you can live with large numbers of frustrated customers. People can and do pirate our software. We do what we can to prevent it, but the biggest weapon

we have against it is customer loyalty, driven at least in part by good customer service and resources. The fact that we have a happy community means that our tech support burden is substantially reduced, as other users will do what they can to help newcomers.

With software, you can only offer good customer service if the software is robust, well documented, and reliable; otherwise it becomes too expensive to deal with the feedback. *CC2 Pro* (and now *Campaign Cartographer 3*) fulfils these criteria.

Good service creates a virtuous circle, giving people willing to buy the software a reason not pirate it, then giving them a reason to upgrade, then help others who own it, and finally recommend it to other people. This gives us a glow, and sells us more software.

Pyramid: **All good things, no doubt! What do you see as the target audience for Campaign Cartographer 3? Is it designed for neophytes? Hard-core gamers? Minis enthusiasts? Has the target audience changed significantly since Campaign Cartographer 2?**

Simon: The target market has expanded. Our add-ons have made *CC2 Pro* much more than a fantasy mapping program, with modern and sci-fi options. The new version with its simplified and improved interface makes it more intuitive for new users as well as some *Campaign Cartographer 2* users from many years ago who abandoned the original *Campaign Cartographer* due to perceived difficulty of use. New art will transform some add-ons; for example, *Dioramas* will be unrecognizably better.

The new version is also aimed at people for whom aesthetic appeal is as important as utility. They don't want their maps to look like a standard map. *Campaign Cartographer 3* will give them the tools to do this.

Pyramid: **Since some of our readers work in the professional side of the gaming world, I'm curious: What are the rights for maps produced with the *Campaign Cartographer* products? Are there any restrictions? Can they be used in commercial products?**

Simon: The simple answer is, in 99% of cases, yes, you can do what you want with your maps. There is, however, some small print . . .

You can redistribute or sell any *Campaign Cartographer 3* native file, but not the supporting artwork if it is ProFantasy's. *Campaign Cartographer 3* maps don't actually contain any PNG artwork; they rely on it being present on your hard drive. You can redistribute any file exported from *Campaign Cartographer 3* in any flat format (PNG, for example). You cannot redistribute any drawing that is or appears to be a way of redistributing our symbols. If you think of *Campaign Cartographer 3* as a word processor, and the artwork as fonts, you'll get a clear picture -- you can produce documents in Microsoft Word in any font and redistribute them; you can even produce PDFs of them, but you can't redistribute fonts or create "books of fonts." To give you an idea of how much of a problem this is, we've had three cases of this in the past 10 years. For *Campaign Cartographer 3,* there is one additional restriction: You cannot release products which consist primarily of floorplan-scale maps with *Campaign Cartographer 3* art -- things like the RPG Objects *e-Adventure Tiles* -- without our written permission. You could do this if you were supplying native *Campaign Cartographer 3* files -- although the end user would, of course, have to have *Campaign Cartographer 3.*

Pyramid: **ProFantasy Software has long had a history of expanding outside the arena of map creation, providing some standalone map products, such as the *World War II Interactive Atlas* and the *Forgotten Realms Interactive Atlas.* How successful have these products been? Have they presented any special challenges?**

Simon: The *Forgotten Realms Atlas* was an enormous challenge, and it has the accolade of being name-checked on *The Onion.* [See http://www.theonion.com/content/node/38664] Wizards of the Coast sent over boxes and boxes of maps and supplements, and after hours of photocopying, chopping, and taping, we had 15' by 15' of maps on the floor which didn't really fit together. It set the bar ridiculously high for similar products -- it contained over 800 maps. It sold through 20,000 copies pretty quickly, but was not reprinted -- something to do with licensing issues that Hasbro were having at the time. We get inquiries after it every day, and we are always hassling Wizards of the Coast to rerelease it or let us do another one. Code Monkey (the e-Tools people) is working on a new *Eberron Atlas* using the

Campaign Cartographer 3 engine, and I'll be interested to see how that turns out.

The *World War II Interactive Atlas* is a great product. Unfortunately it didn't live up to expectations sales-wise, but I think that is more to do with our marketing skills than any failings in the software. *Source Maps: Castles!* and *Source Maps: Temples!* have both sold through their first print runs, and we are following them up with *Source Maps: Cities!* which will support a wider variety of RPGs.

Pyramid: **In your mind, what are the appeal of maps? You can answer in regards to gamers, fans of licenses, or however you'd like. Is it because they're utilitarian, evocative, useful, or what?**

Simon: Maps in the real world mirror reality. You can almost reach out and touch the land masses and feel the heat of the deserts. This is why maps are so important for games -- the same mental furniture which allows us to visualize the "real" gives us an imaginative boost for invented realities. You can really picture that dark alley, and feel the fatigue crossing the great mountain range. And who can resist "Unknowne Land" or "X marks the spot"? Oh, and moving miniatures round on great big printed-out floorplans is really cool!

Pyramid: **Do you have a favorite personal "map" story?**

Simon: Some of ProFantasy's proceeds have been invested in beautiful antique maps. I remember finding a John Speed original stashed away in a dingy bookshop, with counties outlined roughly in color. This meant that the coloration is original -- some poor sap with a brush had to color in 50 maps, hot off the press. Maps colored later by the Victorians were done with painstaking respect -- and are worth far less. I snatched it up and acquired it straight away -- it was definitely a real-life RPG experience. I hope to scan all these maps and build authentic symbol catalogs for *Campaign Cartographer 3* users.

I also really enjoyed watching a five-year-old creating characters using *Character Artist* at GenCon, while an adult customer was asking me if *CC2 Pro* was hard to use. I pointed at the five-year-old.

Pyramid: **I've long had a theory that, in many regards, computer software doesn't actually cut down on work involved so much as improve the final results; for example, if someone was willing to spend an hour in the old days hand-drawing a map on grid paper for a game, then that person will probably spend the same hour using software such as *Campaign Cartographer,* only the results will be orders of magnitude more attractive and (possibly) useful. Do you have any thoughts on this?**

Simon: I think you are basically right; people love to tinker with the software to make the maps look good -- it gives the players the "wow" factor. I'm not putting down mapping on paper -- I do it myself sometimes, particularly when you need a hastily scribbled improvised area. The main difference is that the time invested in a map created in software, if it is done right, really saves time in the future. My campaign map which I did in *CC-DOS* is now a nice *Campaign Cartographer 3* map -- and I didn't have to redraw it from scratch. Many GMs are using *Campaign Cartographer 3* to build an interactive atlas of their worlds -- linking continents to countries to cities to documents and entering the scribble they made during gaming to update their maps. The ability to hide and show certain features makes it possible to create GM and player maps of the same areas, print maps out as overviews or battle mats from the same file, mask areas to show them as required, or even created sepia-toned or distorted images from the same map. The map is simply a database, and when the data is in there it can be updated and viewed in a multitude of different ways. The availability and utility of information in a *Campaign Cartographer 3* map is much greater than that on paper.

Pyramid: **Obviously, I'm guessing the release of Campaign Cartographer 3 is the biggest news for ProFantasy. What's on the horizon for you all beyond that?**

Simon: We'll be releasing a special version of *Campaign Cartographer 3* for NBOS' *Fractal Mapper* and Fluid's *Dundjinni* (other map-making software), at a slightly reduced price. It installs *Campaign Cartographer 3,* but will also install *Campaign Cartographer 3* artwork into the correct place for those pieces of software, too. The artwork is at a reduced resolution so that it is compatible with their software. We think people will prefer *Campaign Cartographer 3,* but the artwork will allow them to choose, perhaps even using more than one piece of software. If this works out,

we'll make future artwork compatible, too.

Our main work for the next year will be updating the add-ons to the new version and creating new art packs. We respond to events quite flexibly, so what we do will depend partially on the success of the forthcoming releases. I hope we'll be able to do a new Atlas in the next year, too.

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Pyramid Review

The Spirits of Niagara (for Niagara)

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Designed by Thomas Liesching

Seven canoes (two for a sixth player, one each for extant positions), whirlpool and sixth-player stickers, 25 paddle-point cards, Hurried Elk foldout, Bathing Beaver pawn, rules; full-color, boxed; $24.95

Competition is getting fierce along the river. Everyone wants those gems, and you can't count on help from your human rivals. To whom do you appeal? *The Spirits of Niagara,* of course. In this supplement to *[Niagara,](#)* collecting one's fabulous jewel selection takes on new directions. In large part it boils down to changing the movement options offered.

For one thing, there's a whirlpool. The game provides a sticker that attaches to one of the clear plastic disks from the original set. You now have to actually keep track of which disks and how many you've sent through the pipeline, because the vortex goes down the river, over the falls, and back into the rotation at the upper end, costing you more paddle points to traverse all the way.

The spirits in question are animal spirits dwelling along the river, and they can be called upon to help the needful adventurer (the whirlpool seems nominally associated with the fish pictured thereon). The edge of the falls were notoriously difficult to reach without slipping over in *Niagara,* but now anyone that far out has an edge of their own: the Hurried Elk. He sits beside the last gem site on the board, waiting to give someone a ride. You can park your canoe atop his head and he'll add two paddle points to your total without increasing the speed of the river. The Bathing Beaver's movement is also governed by the stream; he appears and travels the waterway, but when he falls off the weather indicator is reset to the 0 position. This keeps the weather from becoming a contentious bouncing ball for a select few players.

Your transportation comes with an upgrade as well. Originally each player received a pair of canoes with a single hole dug into each. The new set replaces one of your canoes with a two-hole boat. This one can unbury (or steal) two gems at a time (for a total of three, if you've got the whole fleet launched). So why make it so much easier for everyone to get all these gems? A slightly larger pool of competitors. With this supplement, you can put a sixth player into the expedition. Not only does he have the pawns to get started, there's even a sticker that attaches to the game board to indicate where his tiles are played (at last, a use for some of that vacant land at the head of the river).

Finally, your hand now consists of 10 paddle counters instead of just seven. One of the new tiles is the "1/2/3" playing piece. When played, it affords you a little leeway as to how fast you'll go this turn (and since the number is low, it's a good contender for determining the river's speed as well). The lasso card pulls your boat out of the river entirely for a turn; you may not progress, but you won't be washed downstream, either. Finally, the big guns: a "7" piece that lets you really haul your assets upriver (now you know why you need that lasso).

The supplement continues the quality found in its progenitor. The paddle counters are every bit as good (and they match), and the canoes look and feel like they were cut from the same cloth (so to speak). Bathing Beaver is also a wooden playing piece, and one made with a bit of care. It looks more like an artifact from a gift shop than a pawn from a board game. Hurried Elk may be one of the few disappointments, from a quality standpoint. The idea is solid -- a pair of beast's antlers jutting up out of the water, between which one nestles one's canoe. But it's just a piece of cardboard folded and bent at all the right points, and its fate will be uncertain after several uses.

The new equipment attempts to answer several issues that arise from playing *Niagara*. The weather won't be cornered as before and left in a never-ending loop at one end of the sliding scale. The elk makes those gems at the end more attainable, so you won't have to wait for the right alignment of the stars (or for your opponent's attention to lapse). You can react better with cards like the "1/2/3" tile, and you have greater control over your movement in general. And bringing more players and bigger canoes into play with a single supplement changes any strategies you may have managed to develop. While the play hasn't become any more sophisticated, it is a bit more manageable and less predictable or depressing (or both, if trips over the falls were the norm for your group). *The Spirits of Niagara* have come to help, and by degrees they've done so.

--Andy Vetromile

II&E: Helping Form Match Function

for *GURPS Infinite Worlds*

by Phil Masters

"They call the Intervention Service the I-Cops, and a lot of the time, sure, they do cop stuff. But when did you ever hear police work called **intervention,** *maybe outside some crazy PR-speak? No, they get a lot of jobs that'd make most cops quit the force, and they handle 'em in ways that any real, honest cop would call broken. Minimum, they have to do more undercover and plainclothes stuff than any legit force I've ever heard of. And sometimes, it's plain old-fashioned B&E.*

"Likewise, they call the Penetration Service scouts, and a lot of the time, they're out there playing Davy Crockett, riding the wilderness and ducking arrows. But did Davy Crockett ever have to infiltrate a society 200 years ahead of his own, or work in deep cover in a place where saying the wrong thing to the wrong person could crash the whole of history?

"Face it -- we need people who can handle stuff that ain't cop- work and ain't scouting. And we need to have them available 24-7. The team we don't talk about because they don't exist are good at that, probably, but there's only a few of 'em, and they get the **really** *wacky jobs, and, well, they don't exist. So never mind the PR headache, we're going ahead with II and E."*

-- Colonel John Yarborough, Infinity Patrol (formerly of Denver PD), 2025.

GURPS Infinite Worlds (building on Chapter 20 of the ***Basic Set***) provides a rich and adaptable context for cross-time adventuring, in the form of the Infinity Unlimited. But the Infinity Patrol in that book is designed to handle the sort of issues that Infinity is officially expected to face. The kind of *interesting* problems that the book describes -- the ones that players are going to find interesting, anyway -- too often fall slightly outside the scope of any one part of Infinity's organization structure. Faced with a paperback book from 1985 turning up in a Renaissance echo, or the need to extract Giordano Bruno manuscripts from Azoth-7, or sabotage on a Reich timeline, or the impulse to contaminate the culture of Nergal, it's not clear which division, or even which service, should be sent in -- at least until someone has discovered more about the task in hand.

One answer which Infinity often uses, especially when such problems blow up as unexpected emergencies, is to throw together an *ad hoc* team, taking whichever agents are available at the time, from whichever divisions, and trying to find some with appropriate skills. In game terms, this is fine for one-off scenarios, but makes a continuing campaign hard to sustain. It's also a recipe for ulcers among senior Infinity management; no organization likes to have to *improvise* its way out of regular crises, and the administrative hierarchies of every division which has provided personnel is likely to try and claim authority over the problem, or at least to assert its interest. (This isn't *just* bureaucratic empire-building; every division is responsible for protecting its own people unless they're formally seconded elsewhere for extended service, and officers feel that responsibility keenly.) There's a sense that Infinity's formal structure doesn't always fit its needs.

Which is where the Investigation, Infiltration, and Extraction Section (informally known as the Firefighters) comes in. It's a non- canonical but logical addition to the Infinity structure, and if it looks like a blatant excuse to put together teams of PCs -- well, that just shows that Infinity needs PCs. It not only provides more or less permanent multi-disciplinary teams who expect to tackle the unexpected, it also provides a context for training them in the sort of skills that they'll actually need, as opposed to those which fit the official Infinity model.

Firefighters have to be flexible above all else. One week they'll be investigating a dead agent-in-place on Lucifer-5; the next they'll be on Steel finding a lost Tech Division vulture team; after that they'll be working out whether it was an out-timer who just invented the aerosol can on Dixie-1. Sometimes the Patrol can send a team with expert

knowledge of a particular line, but if they had enough resources to do that regularly it wouldn't be the Patrol. So mostly, Firefighters improvise. But to get away with improvisation in timelines where their accents and assumptions should mark them down as weird, they have to be quick with the cover story -- and sometimes, just as quick with the hypo of Eraser.

Organization

II&E is a new element in the Infinity command structure, just a few months old in its developed form, and it isn't much known to the general public as yet. Unlike ISWAT, there's no deep-deep secrecy here; it's on the books, under its own name, and Infinity spokespeople can and do talk about it if a reporter or Interworld Council representative asks. However, they don't mention it unprompted, because (a) part of its job may involve a certain amount of rule-bending and dirty trickery from time to time, and (b) nobody in Infinity is 100% sure that it'll work as yet, so they'd rather retain the ability to shut the whole thing down with minimum fuss if it all goes bad.

Formally and for payroll purposes, II&E is a subdivision of the Intervention Service Security Division, under the command of Colonel Charlotte Telemann. If anyone does ask, it's described as a set of specialist investigation teams, with the ability to go into short-term cover on a wide variety of timelines. Unlike an ordinary police force's plainclothes investigation department, members are evidently expected to resolve the problems they encounter as often as possible, rather than yelling for uniformed backup to make big arrests -- but hey, that's just part of the Infinity agent ethos.

All this is, in fact, largely true -- but it's only part of the truth, as the name of the subdivision makes rather obvious. II&E is essentially an emergency response unit, albeit with a substantial investigative capability; in fact, the first part of many of its missions consists of finding out what the current problem *is,* after the finely honed instincts or rampant paranoia of some agent-in-place or Infinity high-up have decided that some clutch of anomalies or stray clues smell of trouble. Sometimes, team members have to infiltrate societies on other timelines, or even criminal groups based on Homeline, in the course of their investigations -- and sometimes, they have to recover lost gear or stuff fallen through nexus portals, or even pick up samples of weird out-time technology, or eliminate dangerous magical manuscripts, or bring home rogue agents gone too deep for a simple Internal Affairs bust, or stray tourists too perverse and willful for regular Search and Rescue.

Hence, II&E wants a *wide* variety of skills. It recruits from anywhere within Infinity that these can be found, preferring to take on agents with at least a year or two's field experience in other divisions; however, those other divisions have a natural preference for holding onto their good, experienced people, so II&E often has to take what it can get. Most of its members -- about 70% of the headcount -- are drawn from the Intervention Service, but it has a clear need for the sort of skills often found among the members of the Penetration Service, and it is actively seeking to cross-recruit. Any rivalries between the two services are a relatively small problem here; the real difficulty is that most Scouts joined Infinity because they wanted to be *explorers,* and aren't terribly enthused by the idea of becoming undercover cops and occasional burglars. Frequently, the most effective recruiting pitch that II&E can use is to point out that its members get to see a wider variety of different timelines than many Scouts, who often get stuck in a particular world or type of work.

The Teams

These agents are organized into teams of between four and seven agents, mostly with the rank of Patrolman and mostly each under the command of a single Agent. Quite often, a team will be sent on a mission incomplete, because one or two members are recuperating from injuries, on leave, or off on training courses, or lack some utterly essential skill for this specific job. Teams tend to be kept together, though, partly because they'll have been assembled with at least an attempt to identify complementary skills and personalities and partly because they tend to build up a fair degree of mutual loyalty. Still, *ad hoc* group assignments may occasionally be unavoidable even within II&E, and some degree of personnel transfer and reassignment does happen. Also, the flipside of looking for tight, unforced team loyalty in groups that have to work alone, undercover, away from supervision, is that if team members do somehow prove incompatible, Infinity would rather reassign one or two people than cause a disaster by trying to enforce

unsustainable discipline. A certain amount of shaking out of team rosters is accepted as part of the ongoing process of making II&E work.

The teams in turn are supervised by HQ staff with the rank of Captain, almost all of them with a Justice or Security Division background and the manner of a hardened police dispatch officer. Each of the captains manages between four and six teams; the subdivision also has a few Lieutenants on the strength, deputizing for Captains when they're otherwise occupied or indisposed or leading especially well-regarded or unusual teams. While Colonel Telemann is acquainted with the strengths, weaknesses, and personal records of every team, and will try to assign each task that comes in to a specific and appropriate team, she's a very busy woman, and not always in the office; many jobs go straight to whichever Captain currently has most people free at present, and he's then expected to decide for himself which of his teams is the least worst for this job. Despite this general willingness to delegate problems, the middle-to-high ranks of Infinity, in the annoying way of bureaucracies, are sometimes forceful about asserting themselves and passing down detailed policies when they don't like the way that the teams seem to be operating. Telemann is sometimes seen within II&E as a little too willing to let this attempted micromanagement through -- but she does have a tricky job, and she's still learning what does and doesn't work.

Very Special Teams: One option which II&E is considering, and may implement very soon, is teams selected for specific features or potential. The first such which is likely to be deployed is an all-female team, preferably all with low-tech transport skills, capable of operations along Eleusis Alesia, (see *GURPS Infinite Worlds,* page 79), and also effective for infiltration missions into matriarchal societies, investigations within royal harems, and countless other special tasks. From a game point of view, all this could justify pretty much any sort of common party background or ability, if the GM or players could think of some reason why such a team focus might be seen as serving a purpose.

Patrol Internal Relations

Most members of the Patrol -- certainly most I-Cops in the field -- understand what II&E is, what it does, and why it's probably necessary, and there is little overt friction. Some agents, especially those used to working at HQ or in uniform, such as Intelligence back-office staff or Customs and Inspection, may see it as dangerously undisciplined, and a number of middle-ranking officers resent its tendency to poach some of their best or most promising agents. There have been one or two jurisdictional disputes with Justice, Nexus Oversight, and regular Security Division teams, but these remain isolated incidents for now. Special Ops agents joke about II&E's lack of hitting power and tendency to call for backup whenever some nasty man pulls out a slingshot, but actually rather appreciate the way that II&E keep finding them so many interesting targets.

There is some suspicion among senior officers that Firefighter improvisation sometimes leads to too much cooperation with people who are *supposed* to be "the enemy," including Cabalists and even Centrum agents from time to time. Certainly, Internal Affairs feels the inevitable, instinctive suspicion of any Internal Affairs department towards unorthodox undercover investigators. It may or may not have *infiltrated* II&E.

It is, of course, impossible to generalize about ISWAT, but many of its agents may regard II&E either condescendingly, as a pale imitation of themselves, or more respectfully, as people sharing a burden while being stuck with slightly more bureaucratic oversight. The Interworld Council bureaucracy has a pretty good idea what's going on in II&E, and reserve judgment for now -- but any troubleshooters they send in to find out more are likely to be as coolly cynical as ever.

Characters

The following is a "mini-template" which can be added to any of the standard Infinity templates on pp. 186-187 of *GURPS Infinite Worlds* to produce an effective II&E team member: The template costs 15 points, and the suggested starting level for an II&E campaign is 200 points; these are notably capable agents. In fact, most have typically served in at least two other divisions before they join the Firefighters, and usually find uses for every skill that Infinity has taught them within a few missions. However, because other divisions don't like losing people they regard as good, a lot of those who are permitted to transfer over are the ones who are slightly too enthusiastic, idealistic, cynical, or plain

weird for their previous officers' tastes, which may show up on their character sheets.

(Actually, II&E is developing a slight reputation as a career graveyard, although if it *does* expand, it's going to need to acquire new senior staff from somewhere . . .)

Advantages: 10 points from among Cultural Familiarities [1 each], Languages [varies], Cultural Adaptability [10], Sensitive [5], or Social Chameleon [5]. GMs can add additional options, such as Talents, as they see fit; anything that makes the specific character stand out as especially suitable for II&E duty can be appropriate.

Disadvantages: Nothing is required beyond the standard Infinity Unlimited set. However, note that II&E characters aren't *usually* assigned to a single timeline or undercover mission on Homeline for an extended period, and hence don't usually qualify for the Secret disadvantage. (Their cover stories for undercover work, while crucial, tend to be short-term improvisations.) Therefore, any based on a Penetration Service template will have to take alternative disadvantages, or find the points elsewhere. On the other hand, whichever division they came from originally, II&E service makes an Extremely Hazardous Duty disadvantage entirely appropriate.

Skills: Acting (IQ) [2], and any three of Climbing (DX- 1), Criminology/TL8 (IQ-1), Detect Lies (Per-2), Disguise (any TL) (IQ-1), Driving (any) (DX-1), Electronics Operation (Security, any TL) (IQ-1), Fast-Talk (IQ-1), Interrogation (IQ-1), Lockpicking (any TL) (IQ-1), Makeup/TL8 (IQ), Observation (Per-1), Psychology (Applied, if the GM is drawing the distinction) (IQ-2), Riding (Equines) (DX-1), Savoir-Faire (any) (IQ), Smuggling (IQ-1), Streetwise (IQ-1), or Traps (any TL) (IQ-1), each costing 1 point. Skills acquired from a Division Skill list cannot count towards this template; II&E demands *breadth* from its agents. Conversely, the best II&E agents usually have one or two of these skills at a notably high level.

Note that, unlike the templates in the book, this one defines an ideal, rather than the expected product of a formal training course. All too many II&E members lack this template, although competent team leaders and senior officers try to steer their people towards this pattern.

Team Leaders: A team leader has Rank 2 (+5 points). Most acquire Leadership and Tactics skills, if they don't have them already; the Patrol makes short, intensive military-style training course available to anyone who's just been promoted.

Special Training

II&E members never have the skills they need for the latest mission, and those missions tend to be important. Hence, members get fairly high priority for additional training and refresher courses. Languages are particularly popular, as is acclimatization for a wide variety of known cultures (giving Cultural Familiarity), while military-style intrusion training (primarily improving Stealth skill) is widely seen as the key to staying alive.

Funny Little Secrets: While languages and Cultural Familiarity are often essential for infiltration work, the immediate need in many cases is for the ability to, well, lie convincingly. In addition, some II&E missions are, frankly, burglary jobs, or involve dealings with the rougher side of various societies. Hence, II&E has found the budget to recruit a small group of expert civilian trainers in such things. Members can take courses Acting and Fast-Talk, along with Lockpicking, Stealth, Streetwise, etc.

Many of these instructors have some kind of intelligence background (although some were just brought in from the entertainment business), so they can reasonably refuse to talk about their personal histories in response to casual enquiries. This is convenient in many ways, because some of them have downright shady pasts. Fortunately, someone in Liaison Division was able to find people in Homeline police forces who had old professional acquaintances who were now looking to go straight -- or who would at least consider it if offered good money to pass on their skills instead. There aren't many of these people -- most "criminal technical" skills can be just as well taught by honest security experts -- but II&E wants the best training it can get, wherever it has to go for it. The training available to members thus even extends to the basics of the con artist's craft.

Despite this, and contrary to some rumors within the I-Cops, II&E doesn't actually have any former professional criminals in its actual teams; Colonel Telemann wants professional-grade agents, not potential rogues. Those specialist trainers with illegal backgrounds are carefully watched, and not cleared to learn much about Infinity's activities. Still, they do represent a potential security vulnerability; professional thieves and confidence tricksters are by definition untrustworthy people, and even those trying to go straight are susceptible to temptation, or to exploitation by their old friends.

Even Funnier Secrets: Lastly, despite the above comments, the need for maximum flexibility *may* sometimes lead II&E to recruit field agents from outside Infinity -- and, just possibly, even from outside Homeline. Normally, an out-timer with enough potential to justify breaking secrecy would end up in ISWAT, but there are some borderline cases, and Colonel Telemann has been fighting her corner hard in this respect. (Her colleagues differ over why this might be; she may mean what she says about needing such exotic agents, she may have a relatively dubious opinion of The Secret and be working towards a more liberal policy in Infinity in general, or she may be empire-building.) However, an out-timer needs to have very special abilities indeed to justify such recruitment -- magical talents are one possibility -- and to pass a fairly stringent psychological assessment, checking for reliability. II&E has also managed to acquire a couple of Homeline-born low-end psionic talents.

* * *

With many thanks to Roger Burton West for running the campaign which helped crystallize many of the ideas in this article, and for inputs and commentary.

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Breaking the Speed of Light (or Energy Blast, or Magic Missile, or . . .)

by Steven Marsh

Those who know the world of science understand that there are many limits that we just accept. For example, there's the speed of light; some sense of absolute smallness in the realm of matter (currently, that seems to be atoms, quarks, or superstrings, depending on how the microscope is focused); and in the world of temperature there's an absolute zero and its opposite, the Planck temperature (10^{32} Kelvin).

There are also a large number of limits that are "fuzzier" -- limits that can be broken, or are not universal. For example, the speed of a falling body is constant on Earth but different elsewhere (as is terminal velocity). The sound barrier can be broken, and it has an effect -- a sonic boom -- but otherwise doesn't exactly destroy the fabric of the universe. Throughout history, science has also had numerous barriers that it has broken through: the first blood transplant, the first artificial heart, the drive to clone a human embryo.

However, in most RPGs with magic or fantastic systems (including super powers, psionics, and so on), one thing generally lacking is this sense of barriers, looming tantalizingly out of reach or otherwise serving as an obstacle to "out-think." While a space opera game can immediately evoke a sense of wonder and awe by talking about what it means to go to "Warp Factor 9.9" or "breaking the speed of light," there usually isn't a corresponding element in more fantastic settings. No, magic in most settings generally works like we think science does now: do the formula and, if it's done correctly, you get the same predefined result each time.

Some settings introduce an element of risk to this design (for example, wild magic from the ***Forgotten Realms*** setting), including aspects of backlash or odd effects. But these results are usually seen as the exception, not the norm. What if, instead, a setting had these barriers that were a constant reminder of the fundamental forces these unnatural abilities were dealing with? What if attempting to get near -- or exceed -- these barriers was a goal, or a challenge, or a risk?

Here are some ideas for determining your own "barriers" in fantastic settings, as well as some worked examples for various systems.

Creating Barriers in a Setting

To create a barrier in a setting, there are a just a few questions that need to be resolved by the GM.

Determine the barrier. The first thing the GM should decide is what, exactly, will have a barrier. In many settings this will be straightforward, since there is only one "source" or type of power. For example, in a ***Vampire*** setting, all unusual abilities of the protagonists are assumed to spring from the same well (the power of vampiric vitae).

In other settings, this may not be as obvious. A ***d20 System*** setting might have many different forms of non-scientific energy (magic spells, priestly miracles, psionic effects, etc.); would a barrier apply to all of them, or only one form? One thing to consider if there are multiple paths to power is how much the parity will be disrupted if one form has a barrier imposed that other energy types don't. For example, if there's a barrier in the ***d20 System*** about casting any spells above 6th level but there isn't a corresponding limitation on miracles, then it may adversely affect game balance.

Decide if the barrier is "soft" or "hard." In other words, can the barrier be broken (even if it is difficult or causes other effects), or is it an absolute limit (as best anyone can tell)? The speed of sound is an example of the former, while the speed of light is an example of the latter.

Hard barriers are those that, as best as the laws of the universe are currently understood, cannot be broken. Thus, for

example, if no one within a time travel campaign can travel outside the confines of his own lifetime, that's a hard limit.

Soft barriers are those that can be broken, but doing so causes something else to happen. For example, maybe traveling outside of one's lifetime causes the person to appear as an immaterial shade wherever he goes until he returns to his own time.

Hard barriers are generally those that exist as a warning or an absolute for the campaign; their invocation can form the basis for memorable adventures, either as a limit on a plot or a mystery when they seem to be violated. For example, Isaac Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics were (for the most part) "hard" barriers; thus if a robot allowed itself to be destroyed (violating the third law) without there seeming to be a conflicting order or trying to avoid harming a human being (the second and first laws), then something else must be going on, plot-wise . . . perhaps the robot was obeying a human or protecting his life in a way that others couldn't perceive.

Conversely, a soft barrier can serve as a tantalizing goal, a warning, an obstacle, or all of these. For example, the barrier between the Light and Dark Sides in *Star Wars* can be seen as a soft barrier; there is little to prevent one from going from the Light Side to the Dark Side, but doing so has grave consequences for the person who crosses over.

Likewise a hard barrier can be turned soft at any point by a new discovery or procedure. For decades in the real world, runners largely considered the four-minute mile to be a hard barrier until Roger Bannister ran the length in three minutes, 59.4 seconds in 1954. Similarly if a campaign has a hard barrier forbidding time travel to the exclusivity of one's own lifetime, then a new discovery might permit people to move outside that limitation (perhaps in extremely limited circumstances).

Decide if the barrier is relative or absolute. Relative barriers are those that are dependant on circumstance, location, or individual; absolute barriers are those that are constant. For example, the speed of sound depends on the medium; sound travels more quickly through metal than it does through air, for example, and is thus relative. Absolute barriers are those that are the same throughout the setting, such as the speed of light.

Whether a barrier is considered relative or absolute can depend on the scope of the setting. For example, the accelerative force of gravity is pretty much the same everywhere on Earth, so would be viewed as an absolute constant on any Earth-bound campaign; however, since it varies from planet to planet, it would be a relative constant in an interstellar setting.

In our time-travel example, being limited to one's own lifetime is a relative barrier, since everyone's lifetime is different. However, if the limitation were, say, "time travel is only possible to any point within the past 10 years" or "time travel is only possible to a point exactly 10 years ago" or even "time travel is only possible to the year 1953," then that's an absolute limit.

Absolute limits serve as a campaign-wide defining aspect of special powers, such as "no harnessing or control of flame can exceed a blacksmith's tempered fire [10 dice of damage]" or "no usage of psionic powers can compel someone do to anything." Relative limits serve as a means of personalizing or changing the effects of a campaign's powers with defined limitations, but which can vary depending on the effect attempted or the need need of the plot, such as "no harnessing or control of flame can exceed the hottest fire within a mile of the caster" or "no usage of psionic powers can compel someone to perform a deed more sinful than what the victim has done in the past" (or perhaps "than what the *psionicist* has done in the past"!).

Determine what effects getting near to or breaking the barrier will have. There's no point in having a limit if something interesting doesn't happen when you break it (or get close); break the speed of sound and you get a sonic boom, while getting near the speed of light causes all kinds of temporal weirdness.

This step is somewhat optional, since the answer can just be, "It's not possible" (in the case of absolute barriers), but it's usually more interesting to come up with *some* answer to this. Returning to the time-travel example, we have a relative limit that you can only travel within your own lifetime. What happens if you return to the moment of your birth? What about an hour *before* your birth? What about if you go back three months before your birth? Six months?

Nine months? A year? Five minutes before you die? One second after you die? And so on.

The effect of evaporating the barrier can be as subtle or as impressive as you can imagine (although the more explosive options should be limited in their scope, or difficult in their execution, to prevent anyone with the right powers from crossing the barrier and blowing up the universe). To draw two examples from *Star Trek:* In the original series, there was practically no immediate effect to the *Enterprise* crossing the "impenetrable" energy barrier at the edge of the galaxy (nor the similar one at the center of the Milky Way in *Star Trek V*); at the other extreme, a *Next Generation* episode established that travel faster than Warp 5 in some parts of space will generate subspace fissures, causing objects passing through these "space potholes" considerable damage.

Try to think of any other implications this limit has, if any. This step isn't required, but can be useful. What ways can this barrier be utilized for plot possibilities? How would the existence of this barrier affect the game world? How much or how little does this barrier affect thought about the power or nature of the world? (It's especially important for the GM to consider any loopholes or means of exploiting the barrier that the players might find.)

For example, to the modern world, the speed of light is equally fascinating and frustrating, serving as the "limit" of the universe and also the beginning of possibilities. The speed of light makes our instantaneous communications possible while making the nearest star systems seem impossibly far. Its time-distortion effects allow for any number of "nearly frozen in time" hypotheses, and also opens the door to time travel itself. (If you could move one end of a wormhole near the speed of light, it would advance into the future slower than the other end, permitting one to go forward or backward in time depending on which side you took.) And so on. In comparison, the Planck temperature doesn't get as much press, because it's really too darn hot to matter to most folks (being several orders of magnitude above the heat of the sun).

There are, likewise, some theories that attempting to cause a paradox -- such as going back in time and killing your grandfather -- will cause the universe to wink out of existence. Fortunately the universe has made even attempting this extremely difficult.

Okay . . . these principles may be all well and good in theory; now let's see how they can be applied to a few different settings. Obviously, all of these options are just that (options), non-canonical, and designed to be tweaked. This article describes how these ideas can be applied to four different rules sets, with examples of hard/soft and relative/absolute options.

Hero System/Champions [Hard/Absolute Barrier]

When metahumans first started appearing several years ago, their powers were such that, for many, the most interesting thing about them *wasn't* their replication of comic-book powers. No, what was far more intriguing (to scientists and other thinkers) was the fact that the usage of these powers had strange effects that resulted in time dilation. These weren't the barely measurable microseconds of clocks moving at supersonic speeds, either; these were real, measurable differences.

Scientists eventually concluded that tapping the energy source metahumans draw their power from causes the metahuman to "skip" forward in time. At low enough levels, the effect is almost imperceptible; at higher energy draws, the metahuman can disappear for minutes, hours, days, or even longer.

In game terms, the usage of any super-power causes the empowered individual to move ahead in time; the amount moved forward is determined by the total active points of the power (the active points that are actually invoked, for those abilities whose power level can be set by the user); this skipping is always done after the power activates or at the end of the segment (for powers whose effects last longer than one phase). The amount of "skipping" that results is determined by this chart:

Active Points	Total Time Skipped
5	Nearly imperceptible
10	0.01 seconds

15	0.05 seconds
20	0.25 seconds
25	1 Segment
30	1 Phase
35	1 Turn (Post-Segment 12)
40	1 minute
45	5 minutes
50	20 minutes
55	1 hour
60	6 hours
65	1 day
70	1 week
75	1 month
80	1 season (3 months)
85	1 year
90	5 years
95	25 years
100	Gone (?)

If a character has active points that fall between these ranges, the GM can either round up on the chart or else calculate what the effect would be between these ranges.

Power levels below 25 are considered to have no game effect; if perceptible, the character will seem to blink in and out of phase so quickly that others might see him like a flickering television image. (Of course, GMs are free to invoke these effects in their descriptions; an attack that misses or does no damage, for example, might be explained away by the fact that the metahuman attacked had a power active at 20 points and was therefore flickering in and out.)

Thus, for example, if a metahuman with no other powers active has a 10d Energy Blast (no other Enhancements or Limitations; 50 points) that he uses at full strength, he would wink out of existence after firing the blast, appearing 20 minutes later at the same spot.

Active points are determined for each power, and are *not* totaled to determine a single effect (although the time skipped forward is cumulative). For example, a character who has a 15-point Force Field active and 18 points of Armor (which rounds to 20 for purposes of the chart), the hero would skip forward 0.3 seconds per segment (0.05 seconds + 0.25 seconds), not one turn (15 + 20, which has a value of 1 turn on the previous chart).

GMs should closely scrutinize character who buy additive powers that have the same effect (such as two different types of Armor) to keep them from skirting around the limitations of overly high power levels.

When a character skips forward in time, it's as if they do not exist for game purposes; they are not visible and cannot interact with the environment (nor be acted upon by it). However -- and befuddling to scientists at present -- the universe still treats the character as existing, at least in regards to vector and position. For example, a character using a full 55 points of Flight will wink out of existence at the end of the segment and then appear one hour later, *as if he had been flying at the same vector that entire time* (even though there are no endurance costs or other checks made during that period). Among other implications, this effect permits metahumans to use their powers while aboard vehicles; conversely, if (say) the roof that someone is standing upon is demolished during the period he disappears, he will reappear in midair, only to plummet to the Earth. (And, particularly dangerous, if an object or person moved to the spot where a metahuman stood when he skips across time, the character will appear *within* that object.)

These curious properties have led to some metahumans utilizing their powers not for their own use, but rather to take advantage of the secondary effects. For example, one enterprising hero knew he was going to be at ground zero of a dropping bomb, so he used just enough telepathy to read his own mind, knowing that doing so would send him about a minute into the future (and, he gambled correctly, outside the range of the bomb). Another group of villains, rather

than face capture, used enough of their energies to project themselves well into the future; the world fears the day they might reappear.

According to some calculations (which are disputed among the scientific community), the output of power seems to reach a point where usage at that level results in an infinite "skip" across time. Curiously, the symmetrical nature of this equation seems to indicate that there might be some power levels possible beyond that barrier; in much the same way that Einstein's calculations allow for speeds *greater* than the speed of might (if somehow that speed can be reached without ever actually going the speed of light), so too might a much greater power level than those currently exhibited by metahumans permit their usage. This power level, if it exists, is grounds for discomfort among theorists, since it could allow supremely powerful metahumans without the time dilation effects that plague their lower-powered counterparts. (This threshold, should the GM choose to include it, is probably somewhere around the 400 to 500 active point level; thus at 505 points the metahuman would disappear for 25 years, at 510 points he would vanish for five years, at 515 points he would vanish for a year, and so on.)

This framework is suited for a low-level "gritty" supers campaign that still wants flash-bang powers; metahumans are capable of possessing great powers, but their usage at all but the lowest levels will prove inconveniencing or even dangerous. The barriers of this setting also permit more calculating players a chance to "play" with the time-dilation effects.

D6 System using Magic [Soft/Relative barrier]

How powerful is electricity? Physicists know the answer is almost nonsensical, since the variations of what electricity *is* are so many that it's difficult to give a meaningful answer. Electricity can be as weak as the tingle of fur on a glass rod, or as mighty as a chain-lightning bolt. In modern times, the limitations of what electricity can do are not due to the nature of the flow of electrons, but the ability of the generators to channel them and the devices they power to harness them.

This same idea applies to magic. As best as sages have been able to determine, magic is an infinitely powerful resource. Unfortunately, the ability of magicians to harness this energy is exceedingly finite. But, in much the same way as a water wheel can be driven past its limits by a raging flood, so too can mages access energy beyond what they would normally be able to do. Of course, in much the same way as the water wheel can be destroyed in a torrent, so too can the mage be consumed by attempting to channel too much energy.

In game terms, the mage can choose at any time before rolling the dice that he wishes to open the channel of magic greater than what he could comfortably accomplish. If he does so, he may add as many dice as he wishes to his magic before rolling. However, if he rolls higher than his possible maximum on the roll without the extra dice (not counting the Wild Die) -- which equals six times the number of dice rolled plus any pips -- then he takes a number of *dice* of damage equal to the number that he exceeded this total by. This damage cannot be mitigated, soaked, or otherwise deflected.

Example: Thadeus has 4D+1 in *conjuration.* A troublesome troll is threatening him and his friends, and he really needs an *acid ball* spell to succeed (difficulty 20). He chooses to roll 6D (2D more than his normal skill). He rolls a 23; since this isn't more than the 25 he could have normally rolled (4×6=24, +1), he's fine. If he had rolled a 29, he would take 4D of damage (since 29-25=4).

The usage of Character Points or Fate Points on this roll invokes the threshold rule, as normal; thus there is little benefit in spending Character Points, except that they can be applied *after* the fact and they have the possibility of rerolls on 6s (which may or may not be a good thing).

This option makes magicians much more powerful at medium to high levels, since they can pretty cheaply bump up their final rolls. (After all, when you're rolling 6D -- and have a threshold total of 36 -- the odds of exceeding that 36 with 7D or 8D are relatively slim.) In addition, it allows for "martyr" spells -- there is, theoretically, no limit on the number of dice the player can roll, although at a certain point, his death is assured. Fortunately, the usefulness of high rolls is limited in most cases, and the limitations of spell design time make coming up with new spells impractical for

most would-be martyrs. And if a mage *wants* to spend 60 years creating a spell with a triple-digit difficulty, well . . . he's either going to do something incredibly good, or incredibly wicked.

If the gamemaster wishes to make this an option used only in dire or limited situations, he might rule that, rather than damage, *any* exceeding of the threshold value causes the mage to wink out of existence. (Whether or not the spell goes off before or after is up to the gamemaster.)

If using either option, mages should also have the option of ignoring the rerolling of 6s on a Critical Success of the Wild Die for magical effects (although if he chooses to do so he must declare it before rolling); of course, a 1 on the Wild Die still results in a Critical Result regardless of what the mage chooses. (The reason for this rule is that, without it, apprentice mages rolling 1D could -- without trying to channel more energy -- accidentally inflict 6D or more upon themselves.)

This same system can be used for *Metaphysics* or *Miracles* as well (as well as for usage of the Force, for those playing West End Games' *Star Wars*).

d20 System [Soft/Absolute Barrier]

In this variant, magic and miracles are two sides of the same coin -- with diabolical arcane spells on one side and saintly divine ones on the other. Each use of either drives the user closer to the clutches of evil or good; those who use too much magical energy (of either type) may find themselves little more than a pawn of a higher power.

In game terms, each type of magic has a certain number of uses before the caster's soul belongs to one side or the other in the great cosmic struggle. A caster can cast a total of 666 levels of arcane spells before he becomes fully aligned with the darkness, and 333 levels of divine spells before he becomes an agent of light. (Of course, what gods are aligned with either side is dependant on the campaign setting.) "Levels" refers to the level of spells cast (or spell points utilized, in variants of the *d20 System* that don't use spell levels); thus a caster could cast 111 3rd-level divine spells or 37 9th-level divine spells, or any combination in between.

For arcane spells, every 222 levels pushes the caster one alignment step closer to Evil. (Thus the caster will be Evil after casting 444 levels' worth of arcane spells, barring any other alignment-altering affects.) In addition, regardless of the caster's current level, the casting of the 666th level of spell results in the caster being turned over (perhaps mentally, perhaps bodily, perhaps both) to the dark forces powering arcane spells.

A similar process applies in reverse for divine spells. Every 111 levels pushes the caster one alignment step closer to Good, with the caster becoming a full agent of the light upon casting the 333rd level.

If a caster has access to both arcane and divine spells, it's possible for that person to ping-pong between various alignments; however, upon casting the 666th level of arcane or the 333rd level of divine, the caster fully signs on with that side, and access to the other form of magic is cut off.

Besides the alignment-changing effects, use of spells should cause the character to look and behave as if he were more closely tied with the chosen power. Thus a priest who draws heavily on divine magic might find his skin giving off a permanent glow, which grows brighter as his usage continues.

What's In a Name?

One of the interesting aspects about creating a barrier is that you get to give it a name (such as the speed of light, or speed of sound). None of the example applications here have been given a name, mostly because their name would probably be dependant on the setting. For example, the *d20 System* might be given names like "the Ascendancy Threshold" or "the clutch" (as in "When will a mage succumb fall into the darkness's clutches?"). The *D6 System* example might be given names such as "the suicide spell" or "the mana purge."

Just as likely, a barrier would be slapped with a name associated with the person who discovered, popularized, or codified it. Thus in the *Hero System* example, if the effect was discovered by Nicholas Vashim, then it might be called "the Vashim effect."

Regardless, giving an interesting name to a barrier is one of the keys to sparking the imagination of players seeking to quantify, identify, or conquer

What happens upon reaching the 333/666 threshold is up the DM. Perhaps the most game-worthy option is for the character to continue walking the land; he has merely removed himself from the day-to-day struggle of morality, and will follow the whims and wishes of his master from then on. Or perhaps the character is assumed fully into hell or heaven (maybe to make future appearances in the campaign for special missions).

Regardless of what occurs, this option is best reserved for those campaigns where the use of any magic is cause for consideration -- such as Gandalf's reluctance to rely on powerful effects -- and where those who wield mysterious powers are viewed with hesitation and suspicion, regardless of their affiliation. (After all, how many people would be reluctant to have an agent of ultimate good in their midst, especially if that person is judgmental or critical of any transgressions?) This system can also lead to strange situations that provide for interesting roleplaying opportunities; priests within more sinister demihuman tribes, for example, would be as ill-trusted as they were useful, since each application of their healing powers would bring them closer to being an agent of their philosophical enemy.

Mage: The Ascension or *Changeling: The Dreaming* [Hard/Relative Barrier]

The more powerful one is, the more restrictions one places on that power. A hulking gardener can lug around tremendously heavy equipment, but must be careful lest his touch destroy delicate flowers. In this variant, such is the case of practitioners of magick.

Each level of Arete or magick Sphere brings with it a ban -- something the magician cannot affect. These are relatively broad but specific objects, people, ideas, or things that the mage cannot affect with his magick. Some sample bans might include:

- Cannot affect children
- Cannot affect anything of a certain color
- Cannot affect any politician
- Cannot affect any noble gas
- Cannot affect great spirits of the weaver
- Cannot affect any mind motivated by fear
- Cannot affect anything made of wood
- Cannot affect any form of life less than one year old
- And so on.

The Storyteller should only choose bans that can, in some way, apply to the character. For example, if a hermetic mage only has Mind magic, then "cannot affect weaver spirits" should never be chosen as a ban, since the mage normally can't affect that type of spirit. If a magical affect targets something of the ban -- directly or indirectly -- then the effect simply does not happen, as if it had been fully disbelieved by the target.

Since a mage gets a ban for each level of Arete and each point he has in a Sphere, he may have dozens of bans at higher levels of power, many of which he doesn't know the full nature of (and might not be aware he has at all). These bans are chosen by the Storyteller and may have some connection to the character's background, recent events, or random selection. For example, a mage who was attacked by a vicious pit bull might discover that his magicks no longer affect dogs, pets, or flowers.

Clever mages might find ways of exploiting their bans. Thus a mage who learns that he cannot affect anything red might have his companions dress in crimson garb, so that -- should he ever need to fire a damaging affect at someone he cannot see -- he can be reasonably assured of not harming his friends.

Regardless, mages would no doubt go to great lengths to keep their bans secret, and may give careful consideration before attempting to advance their knowledge: Each glimpse into a new level of power brings with it the risk of some

crippling new ban.

This system can work as is for *Changeling: The Dreaming;* simply choose a new ban for each point of Glamour and each level of Art.

* * *

Many aspects of the world are defined by what we can't do as much as what we can, and our struggle to understand and maneuver around the obstacles that demark what we can't do is one of our great strengths. By introducing an intriguing barrier to a game world, you can put a new spin on a long-familiar system. Ultimately, the only barrier is your imagination.

Argus, the Man with a Hundred Psionic Eyes

for *GURPS*

by Bevan Thomas

Comic books and movies are filled with stories of "living weapons," people granted vast powers and then forced to obey some ruthless organization or individual. Treated as less than beasts, they are tragic, wretched, and incredibly dangerous.

Argus is an example of such a tortured individual, a deadly, unpredictable opponent for superheroes and other powerful characters. Granted vast psionic powers by the mysterious Project: Third Eye, he lives in almost permanent agony, and with no control over the mental energy that crackles within him. He is no longer sane, no longer truly conscious of what's happening to him, and has been reduced to a living weapon of mass destruction, a tactical nuke made flesh.

Argus

Philip Johnson was a nondescript man who worked with the government until he was approached by a mysterious man who claimed to be a federal agent, and who asked him to take part in Project: Third Eye. Johnson was brought to a secret installation where, over the next few months, he was subjected to a wide variety of experiments by three scientists who wished to test whether it would be possible to grant a person psionic powers.

The experiments were far more successful than the scientists had ever dreamed. They unlocked the complete potential of Johnson's brain, granting him vast power. And that was when things began to go wrong. The first scientist vanished in a pillar of fire, and the second one was skewered by telekinetically lifted scalpels. The third just stared at Johnson, who in turn simply crouched on the ground, his eyes shut and his hands over his ears as he tried to block-out the sounds around him. The scientist started to scream in abject terror.

Soldiers fired at Johnson, but the bullets bounced off a force field, leaving the man unhurt. Then the soldiers were suddenly hurled through the air, the lucky ones slamming against the wall, the unlucky ones sent flying out the window.

Johnson looked in desperation at one of the soldiers, a man named Marcus Russell.

"Help me," he moaned before collapsing from exhaustion.

The soldiers quickly sedated Johnson, and investigated the carnage. Along with some of the soldiers, two of the scientists were dead. The third lay on the ground and stared at Johnson in terror, his mind completely shattered.

"Argus," whispered the scientist. "Argus . . . Argus . . . Argus."

Over the next year, Project: Third Eye did their best to figure out exactly what Johnson had become. After many costly experiments, it was deduced that Johnson could access any psionic power, but had no control over them. One second he would be reading someone's mind, the next he'd be levitating or setting someone on fire. His subconscious appeared to be lashing out against everyone and everything. Furthermore, whenever Johnson wasn't using his powers, he suffered almost unbearable pain, as his psionic energy crackled against his brain.

The surviving scientist kept repeating "Argus" over and over again, and someone realized that it referred to Argus from Greek mythology, a man with one hundred eyes. This likely was represented by how Johnson's "third eye" had opened over his entire body. It was decided that Johnson would be renamed "Argus."

After the experiments were complete, the people behind Project: Third Eye made a decision. They had in their position a weapon of almost unlimited power, and they intended to use it. A few favors called in, and all records pertaining to Philip Johnson were wiped from existence. He had zeroed, and all that remained of him was an engine of destruction.

Argus spends most of his time unconscious in a vat of chemicals. When the Project has use of him, the vat is shipped to the target with him in it, and when it arrives, it is disconnected from the tubes that circulate the chemical bath. After that, those that delivered Argus have around five minutes to get to safety before he wakes up. When Argus awakes, the first thing he does is to telekinetically shatter his vat, and then he begins his path of destruction. After his job is done, Hermes is deployed to bring him back in.

Argus is ruled by a bizarre part of his subconscious mind that seems to have three goals: protect Argus from harm, protect Hermes from harm, and escape his headache by using the cosmic power as much as possible. Unless he or Hermes is in danger, the psionic powers he employs are random, and change every few seconds. One moment Argus might be setting a building on fire with pyrokinesis, the next he might be reading someone's mind with telepathy, and then he might start to levitate in the air. They target friend and foe alike, with only Hermes and him exempt. No matter what psionics Argus is currently using, he will always have a force field and mind shield up as general self-defense. If he is in extreme danger, he can temporarily boost this abilities using cosmic power. For example, he could use 55 points to temporarily boost his force field DR to 50.

What's left of Philip Johnson is in hell. Those few times that he's awake, he's in complete agony, the pain only temporarily lessened when he projects psionic energy. And then, he has no control over exactly what energy he projects. He spends most of his time screaming, babbling, or just looking blankly as his unconscious manipulates his body. In a few moments of lucidity, Johnson has attempted to commit suicide, but he's always been "saved" by his psionics.

Argus   *884 points*

Attributes: **ST** 11 [10]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 11 [10]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 11 [2]; Will 16 [20]; Per 13 [5]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]

Advantages: Damage Resistance (force field +20%; psychokinetic -10%) 40 [220]; Danger Sense (ESP -10%) [13]; Mind Shield 10 (telepathic -10%) [36]; Modular Abilities (Cosmic Power: always on -20%; psionics only -20%; unconscious only -20%; uncontrollable -30%) 300 [600]; Special Rapport (Hermes) (telepathic -10%) [4]; Zeroed [10]

Disadvantages: Chronic Depression [-15]; Chronic Pain (agonizing headaches whenever not using cosmic power) [90]; Duty (serving Project: Third Eye; almost all the time, involuntary) [-25]; Skinny [-5]; Supersensitive [-15]

Skills: Area Knowledge (home town)-13 [2]; Computer Operation-13 [2]; Drive (automobile)-12 [2]; Electronics Operation (surveillance)-13 [4]; Guns (pistol)-13 [2]; Hobby Skill (stamp collecting)-13 [2]; Intelligence Analysis-12 [4]; Karate-11 [2]; Research-13 [4]

Appearance

Argus is a tall, emaciated man with long red and a long ragged beard. His blue eyes crackle with energy when his cosmic power is in use. He is usually naked.

* * *

Hermes

Marcus Russell served in the army for a few years before he ended up as a guard at Project: Third Eye. He witnessed the transformation from Philip Johnson to Argus, and gazed into the tortured man's eyes among the carnage of the lab just before Johnson collapsed from exhaustion. Somehow that moment caused a psychic link to be created between Russell and Johnson, and for Johnson's unconscious to consider Russell to be a "friend."

This link has been exploited by the Project. Russell is now "Hermes," named after the god who defeated the mythological Argus by causing him to fall asleep. His role is simple. After it has been decided that Argus has caused enough destruction, Hermes comes in and talks with the mad psionicist, soothing him and eventually convincing the man to temporarily deactivate his force field. When that happens, Hermes shoots him with a heavy-duty tranquilizer and other agents arrive to put Argus in a new vat. For some reason, this fools the unconscious mind every single time. Apparently there is something about Hermes that makes Argus unable to resist surrendering to him.

Though Russell is incredibly well paid for a job he is rarely required to do, it has really started to gnaw at his mind. He feels a little of Argus' pain through their psychic link, and it disgusts him to see a man being treated in such a degraded manner. He has started to drink excessively as a way of dealing with the problem, and spends most of his free time fishing, the one activity that gives Russell some solace.

Hermes   *240 points*

Attributes: **ST** 13 [30]; **DX** 13 [60]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 11 [10]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d/2d-1; BL 34 lbs.; HP 13 [0]; Will 13 [10]; Per 11 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15]; Fit [5]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Rank 3 (military) [15]; Security Clearance (Project: Third Eye; free access to a narrow range) [10]; Special Rapport (Argus)(telepathic -10%) [4]; Wealth (Wealthy) [20]

Disadvantages: Alcoholism [-15]; Appearance (unattractive) -4; Bad Temper [-10]; Duty (serving Project: Third Eye; quite rarely) [-7]

Skills: Area Knowledge (home town)-11 [1]; Detect Lies-11 [4]; Diplomacy-13 [12]; Driving (automobile)-13 [2]; Expert Skill (psionics)-10 [2]; Fast-Talk-13 [8]; First Aid-11 [1]; Fishing-13 [4]; Guns (pistol)-15 [4]; Guns (SMG)-14 [2]; Guns (rifle)-16 [8]; Karate-13 [4]; Knife-14 [2]; Soldier-11 [2]; Stealth-12 [1]; Survival (desert)-10 [1]; Tactics 11-[4]; Tracking-12 [4]

Appearance

Hermes is a large, muscular man with a heavy face, brown moustache, and his brown hair in a crew cut. He usually wears military fatigues, and carries a bowie knife and auto pistol.

Project: Third Eye

The Project is an incredibly well funded organization dedicated to the study of psionics, with a particular focus on figuring out how to grant psionic powers to people who lack the natural capability for psi. Their only real success, if it can be called that, is Argus. He is currently being studied by them, and occasionally, on orders from their superiors, they send the mad psionicist against particular individuals and organizations.

How Project: Third Eye is used in the campaign will depend a lot on who or what the GM decides is behind the Project. Is it the government, an organization that splintered from the government, a criminal mastermind, a philanthropist seeking to create his own metahuman crime-fighters, or even the Illuminati? No matter who the Project ultimately serves, anyone who gets involved with Argus will attract their attention. Project: Third Eye is incredibly well

funded and diligently run. It can be a powerful patron or a deadly enemy. The choice is up to the GM.

Argus in the Campaign

Characters are most likely to encounter Argus if he is being unleashed against a target. Depending upon the circumstance, he could be set against the player characters themselves, against someone they are fighting, or the PCs might simply get caught in crossfire. If the PCs are powerful or insane enough, they might attempt to confront Argus directly; others might instead study him from afar, noticing the black helicopters that come to collect the tortured metahuman. Alternately, Hermes could decide that he can't be a party to Argus anymore, and he seeks the aid of the characters to liberate Johnson.

If the PCs discover Argus' existence, there is a good chance they will want to free Johnson and shut down Project: Third Eye. If the Project is funded by the government, then this might present ethical and practical difficulties for the heroes. If the GM would prefer the characters to be working with the Project rather than against it, then he could have Argus get out of control (possibly with the death of Hermes), requiring the Project to enlist the player characters in bringing him in.

Variations on the Theme

Argus the Cosmic Mage: For settings where magic is more prominent than psionics, Argus could have been created from an experiment to artificially grant Magery. In that interpretation, Modular Ability would have the "Spells Only" limitation, and Argus would possess Magery, lots of Fatigue Points, and possibly levels of Mana Enhancer.

Vessel of Divine Power: In this interpretation, the experiments on Johnson caused spiritual energy to enter into him from some god, demon, or other being. His "unconscious" is this force who is manipulated Johnson for its purposes. Argus gains the Channeling advantage and his cosmic power is not confined to psionics, but instead to whatever is within the spirit's power and it wishes to send.

* * *

Living Weapon   *445 points*

A living weapon is a powerful metahuman who has been enslaved by some person or organization, turned into a creature with no purpose except to be unleashed against the enemy. Few foes are as tragic as this wretched, broken thing.

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

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]

Advantages: 500 points worth of exotic and supernatural advantages.

Disadvantages: Duty ("living weapon;" almost all the time, extremely hazardous, involuntary) [-25] and -50 points worth of disadvantages to represent the physical, mental, and emotional scars of slavery.

Pyramid Review

Treehouse Rainbow & Xeno

Published by [Looney Labs](#)

Designed by Andrew Looney

15 Plastic Pyramids in five colors & one Treehouse Die; $9

[Icehouse, The Martian Chess Set,](#) published by Looney Labs, has something of a problem. The problem is not in the play, as the various sets of colored and hollow plastic pyramids form the components to a variety of games, both big and small, much like an ordinary deck of cards can be used to play anything from **Poker** to **Euchre.** Rather, while many of the games are fun to play -- best typified by the booklet [12 Games for Icehouse Pieces](#) -- it is actually quite difficult to obtain the various tubes of pyramids because games stores do not want to stock what they see as an awkward product to sell. This is not a problem for Looney Labs' other games, such as [**Fluxx**](#) and [**Are You A Werewolf?,**](#) but, then again, what can you do with a tube of 15 plastic pyramids in one color?

To address this challenge, Looney Labs is re-launching the **Icehouse** family with a new game called [**Treehouse,**](#) which is best described as an **Icehouse** starter set. Available in two different sets -- **Xeno** and **Rainbow** -- both consist of a tube containing 15 pyramids divided into five differently colored stacking sets and a **Treehouse** die marked TIP, SWAP, DIG, AIM, HOP, or WILD. The rules for the game itself are printed on the outside of the tube, which both indicates the simplicity of the game and the ease of reference for the rules. The only difference between the two sets is colors of both the pyramids and the die. **Rainbow** contains red, green, yellow, blue, and black pyramids with a black die, while **Xeno** has pyramids that are purple, orange, clear, cyan, and white, and the die is white.

Designed for two to four players, each player controls one set of pyramids in a single color, with the fifth kept separate as the house set. This house set is placed in the middle of the table in a line, with one pyramid pointing upwards and the other two pointing left or right. A pyramid can only point in these directions. Each player places his set stacked like a Christmas tree parallel to the house set. The objective is for a player to get his set from this starting configuration to match that of the house set, which will win him the game.

Getting a set to match the house set is simple. On his turn a player rolls the **Treehouse** die and applies the result. If a player cannot apply the result to his own set, then he must apply it to the house set. If he cannot do that, then the die is re-rolled. The results of the **Treehouse** die are as follows:

- **TIP** -- Knock over an upright piece or stack. If a stack, all pieces must point the same way.
- **SWAP** -- Exchange the places of two pyramids.
- **HOP** -- An upright leaps up and lands somewhere along the line, even on another pyramid, forcing it to stand upright.
- **DIG** -- A lying down pyramid dives down underground and comes up somewhere along the line. If it comes up underneath another piece, it must also stand up.
- **AIM** -- Point a piece in another direction.
- **WILD** -- Do any one of the above actions, either to the player's own set, or to the house set.

Like the best Looney Labs titles, **Treehouse** is both incredibly short and simple to play. Indeed, a game should not last more than five to 10 minutes, and upon our first play with just two players, the game lasted barely two minutes. More players make for longer games.

Obviously, **Treehouse** possesses a high random factor, but a player is occasionally free to apply the results of the die

throw to the piece of his choice, all dependent of course, upon the configuration of both his own set and the house set. Just as often, a player will be forced to apply a disadvantageous result, either to his own or the house set. The result is that just as in the designer's *Fluxx*, a player can win the game on another player's turn, here because the house configuration has been changed to match that of his own set.

Treehouse is mind-bogglingly easy to both learn and play, and easy to expand upon. To start with, the publisher makes rules for another three little games available on its website that can be played with the one *Treehouse* tube. With three *Treehouse* sets of one type, and the *3HOUSE* rules booklet, it is possible to play what are considered to be the best classic games of the *Icehouse* system -- *IceTowers, Martian Chess,* and *Binary Homeworlds.* Five *Treehouse* sets are enough to play every *Icehouse* game! Another beer 'n' pretzels game, *Treehouse* is *very* pocket friendly, both in terms of packaging and pricing, making it the perfect entry into the *Icehouse* system.

--Matthew Pook

Random Thoughts On . . . Props

I'm trying to get as many columns "in the bag" before packing up my life to go to Indianapolis, so we're trying the "Random Thoughts On" experiment again (which went okay last week, so now we milk). You know the drill: One hour, less thought, parenthetical asides.

This week we're talking about props. Long-time readers know my stance: I love 'em. If you don't . . . well, sadly I don't have much for you this week.

Now, rather than dwell on the hmms and haws of hypothetical props, I'm going to spend this installment describing some of the props I've done in the past, what they were used for, how well they were received, and so on.

Fake CNN.com Article

The Prop: I took a real article from CNN.com, saved it as a complete HTML (with all the ads and everything), and edited the saved text to say what I wanted to. In this case, I think I modified a month-old kidnapping story (with pictures of grieving parents), turning it into a story where the parents were horrified that their family had been attacked by strange creatures. (This was for a *Werewolf* game.)

Total time to construct: Less than one hour (probably closer to 30 minutes)

Upsides: Quick and easy to do. It looked and felt very authentic.

Downsides: I felt like I was "cheating," and was afraid that if someone else was a CNN reader that they would recognize the images of the story I adapted. This might be obviated by using an archive article, but then I'd need to figure out what I'd like to do. Also, it did feel a bit creepy adapting the article.

Reception: Pretty favorable; no one raved over it, but no one said it detracted or was lame.

Notes: The difficulty with using a site such as CNN.com to use as the basis for the "faking" point is that you're limited to the kinds of stories they cover. (You probably won't find an article with a picture available about a random mid-level official resigning in a city-wide investigation.) Fires, floods, and other disasters are the most likely ones to modify for this purpose. And, obviously, this technique can only be used for modern campaigns.

Cube of Power or Somesuch

The Prop: In my first session as a GM (running *GURPS Supers*), I created a puzzle cube out of cardboard that needed to be reassembled into a smooth surface. (The non-smooth edges were hand-drawn "circuits" and the like that indicated it was broken and taken apart.) To thwart the evil doomsday plot (which I confess to having no memory of now), the PCs needed to assemble it.

Total time to construct: About an hour. To assemble, tape cubes 1, 2, and 3 into links of a chain (see the first photograph); the middle link *must* be cube 2, but cubes 1 and 3 can be on either side (since cube 2 can rotate in the center regardless of how it's arranged, it doesn't really matter). The puzzle is to assemble it such that it's a featureless cube (in other words, all the non-white sides are on the inside); see the second photograph for how it's supposed to look all over.

The cubes

Unassembled   Assembled

Upsides: Tactile puzzle proved satisfying to a couple of the players. Fortunately it didn't take too long to solve, meaning it wasn't a drag on the storyline for those who weren't interested.

Downsides: Very obviously a "puzzle" for its own sake. It was also the kind of puzzle that only one player could deal with at a time. Also, if the players had ended up being stumped, I didn't have any backup plan for how the adventure could have continued. Finally, I had no provisions for how the players could use their character knowledge to solve it if they weren't interested in doing so as players.

Reception: Pretty warm. One player quite liked it.

Notes: The basics of this puzzle can be used in various situations. For example, the complete cube could show a map

or a code (since I think the completed cube has only one possible arrangement . . . although even if I'm wrong, it's easy enough to reassemble into the "correct" way).

Tarot Deck

The Prop: For one small fantasy campaign (two players), I anticipated the PCs would take an interest in a fortune teller I had in a town. In fact, I anticipated that one character in particular would actually ask for a reading. So in preparation I took an old tarot deck I had (a snazzy Russian art one in a purple velvet pouch), practiced my fake shuffling, arranged the deck into a predetermined order that would be cool, and came up with a patter to go along with those cards. ("Well, this sequence isn't necessarily bad unless you have the Death card. [turns over next card] Oh, dear.") I even kept a second prepared deck on hand for the other player, in the unlikely case that he was the one who wanted to see the teller.

Of course, the information gleaned from the soothsayer provided useful insight into the story as well as laid the seeds for future developments. (In the stories, these fortune-teller visits are never trivial "You will meet a stranger who won't make eye contact . . ."-type dribble. No, they're always the amazingly pointed clues of fortune laid out before the heroes, as if some invisible hand were behind it all . . . an invisible hand belonging to a balding bespectacled man with a fondness for Mountain Dew.)

Total time to construct: About 20 minutes (most of which was spent trying to get the fake shuffling down)

Upsides: Cheap (if you already own or can borrow the deck), fast, effective. It's one thing to do the song and dance of having the GM *say* that the soothsayer deals the Fool card; it's another thing to actually deal it.

Downsides: Fairly limited scope; more or less a single-shot trick (unless the fortune teller becomes a recurring part of the campaign). In addition, it requires some memorization of the patter, since it breaks the suspension of disbelief to be looking at a script why dealing the cards. Fortunately, with a simple reading -- say, a four-card pattern -- this isn't too difficult.

Reception: Very good. The player I was targeting didn't know how I did it, and thought (briefly) that I had made up the reading on the fly.

In-Game Website

The Prop: For a LARP I was helping to run, I made a website that existed as both an in-game and character aid; it was entirely "in character," and consisted of information my character had found, hooks for other adventures, and long-term foreshadowing. Then I handed out business cards in-game with my name and website on there. Yes, for almost a year, birdonawire.info was no doubt confusing people who stumbled across it via random Google searches. (Sadly, it's no longer around.)

Total time to construct: About 5-10 hours, I'd guess.

Upsides: Cheap (only the cost of the domain name), very immersive.

Downsides: It takes a lot of work; not only did I need to generate the content, I needed to generate the "shell" as well. (It's like making the paper that a clue is going to be written on.)

Reception: Mixed to non-existent. Although a few people thought it was cool, I don't think it was worth the amount of work I put into it, since I'm not sure how many of the players combed through it for the clues and hooks that were in there. In hindsight, maybe a blog would have served the same purpose and worked better (although I *did* get to practice a bunch of my HTML and Javascript). In particular, many of the newer blogs offer a lot of possibilities -- pictures, voice recordings -- that didn't exist when I created my site.

Notes: It might be possible to whip something up more quickly using an established software package, such as

Dreamweaver or even Microsoft Word, but I didn't try that; I'm a hand-coding kind of guy.

* * *

That's it for this installment. Unless some mysterious benefactor calls up between now and Sunday with a ticket to Columbus, I won't be going to Origins this year. So rather than waiting for the red phone to ring, I'll encourage you all to tune in next week: Same Pyratime; same Pyrachannel.

--Steven Marsh

The Towers: A Fantasy Metasetting

for *GURPS*

by William H. Stoddard

One of the hallmarks of fantasy, and especially of high fantasy, is the invented world. Rather than taking place on Earth, many fantasy novels and campaigns have entirely imaginary settings, with their own history and geography and even their own natural laws.

The traditional division of labor in this style of gaming is that the GM creates the world and the players explore it. Ideally, the artistry of the worldbuilding will be one of the big rewards of joining the campaign. On the other hand, it can be difficult for players to come up with characters who fit into an imaginary world, especially one that's new to them. The GM may help them out with various stratagems, most of which have literary precedents, such as having them come from an isolated village (like d'Artagnan in *The Three Musketeers*), a peaceable and less fantastic land (like Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit*), or even another country or world (like Dorothy Gale in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* or the four Pevensey children in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*). But this approach limits the players to characters with few established relationships or resources. On the other hand, characters built as natives of the world may suffer from the players' unfamiliarity with it -- whether because they don't understand the setting or because they aren't yet involved in it emotionally.

"The Towers" is designed to offer a way around this. To avoid the gap between players who know nothing of the world and a GM who has to get it across to them, it makes the players co-creators of the world. The GM's role is not to come up with all the details, but to harmonize the players' inventions. To make such invention easier, and to give the PCs more influence on the world, it's a microcosmic setting: an entire universe focused into a single locality, whose surroundings are unknown and potentially threatening. It's not a setting, with fixed attributes, but a metasetting, a resource that players can use as a framework in jointly developing the setting that suits them.

The Backstory

A long time ago, centuries or even millennia in the past, there was a great empire that ruled the known world. Its people were masters of powerful sorcery, based on commanding the aid of spirits through carefully negotiated treaties and covenants. As a byproduct of this, they were able to make amazing enchanted devices that gave many of the benefits of high technology. Unfortunately, they were not masters of themselves. As conflicts between sorcerous factions grew deeper, the world experienced a breakdown, not merely of human law, but even of natural law, falling from order into chaos.

In at least one place, a small group of skilled sorcerers were able to hold back chaos by working together. They improvised a compact that bound the local supernatural forces into stability. Many centuries later, their heirs are still maintaining that compact, through a cycle of annual rituals that reenact its making and through great rituals every few decades. Whenever all the people who were alive at the last great ritual have died, a new great ritual is needed, conducted by the heads of the various sorcerous lineages.

The founders weren't alone when they did this. They had families, students, and loyal guards and servants. And they conducted their rite in an ancient fortress, with multiple high towers linked together by a high wall, which became their dwelling place.

Creating the Lineages

At this point, the players come in. Each PC in the campaign comes from a different lineage, with its own customs and

style of magic. The players invent these to suit themselves; the GM then fits them together into a larger pattern.

To start with, the players should pick out themes for the magical powers of their Houses. Each House should have its own distinct theme. In *GURPS* terms, each House has at least one distinct magical power. All these powers have the same basic source, the aid of spirits; but they may have distinct modifiers, depending on their use of gestures, incantations, materials, and other ritual elements. Each power has its own Talent and its own abilities. New abilities can be learned, and much of the training of the magically gifted aims to develop such abilities.

In addition, each House has its own internal laws and customs. Is the headship of the House determined by seniority, appointment by the previous head, election by the House as a whole, passing tests of skill, supernatural omens, or some other process? Is headship open to both sexes, or reserved to one? Are possessions, positions, and House standing inherited in the male line, from father to son; or in the female line, from mother to daughter (so that a young man is the natural successor, not of his father, but of his mother's brother)? What are the rules of marriage -- monogamy, polygamy for one or both sexes, or even something as exotic as group marriage? All of this will affect the interrelationships among the Houses.

(If different houses have different customs, intermarriage between them can get complicated. GMs should assume at least one meta-rule: in any marriage involving the chosen heir to a House, the heir will remain in his own House, and the other member of the couple will change Houses. This means that the heirs to different Houses can't marry, which offers the possibility of plots about tragically hopeless love for players who want a campaign with romantic themes.)

Players can go on to work out as many other details as they like. If they want to make up a House cuisine, or style of clothing, or traditional story about the founder of the House, encourage them! All this gives the GM a more richly textured world at the cost of very little work to him.

The point where GM effort is needed is this: All these Houses have to be woven together into a coherent whole. It will often be useful for a GM to look at the existing list of Houses, figure out which symbolic element is lacking, and make up a House to cover it, with its own customs and its own style of magic.

It's a good exercise for players to draw up family trees for their Houses. Because the Towers are a microcosm, the Houses are fairly small: a typical House has five children aged l5 or less, two youths aged 16-25, five adults of an age to bear or raise children (26-55), and three older adults. In other words, the age distribution is somewhat more like that in an industrialized society than a medieval one; the Gifted lead longer lives, thanks partly to the life-extending effect of their own magical natures and partly to their having access to effective medical treatment, and so they can get married late and bear relatively fewer children. The GM can draw up a tree for any additional House. If some Houses have people who married in among their numbers, the GM can determine where they came from and who they're related to in their original Houses.

The Site

The Towers is a huge castle, covering two or three acres. Its outer wall has a number of towers: as many as there are Houses, plus two more on either side of the main gate. Each House inhabits one tower, which holds its living space, its work areas for magical rituals and specialized practical skills, its shrines, and its storage space. Towers average five stories high, with the main entrances above ground level. They're joined by a wall three stories high, and wide enough for two or three people to stroll on it side by side -- or for duels or battles to be fought.

Down on the ground level are barracks for guards on active duty and stables for their mounts, next to the main gate; quarters for married guards and their families and for servants; work areas such as the kitchen, the laundry, and the scriptorium; and storage space for bulk goods such as preserved foods. Upper levels of these buildings include quarters for the high-ranking servants, the main dining hall, greenhouses, and archives. The buildings are arranged around the perimeter of the enclosed space. Its center is a walled off pentagon used for rituals, with an open stage at one corner.

There are also underground levels. The Towers is built on the site of a natural hot spring; artificial channels lead its waters into baths at the bases of the various towers. One of the guard towers has a small dungeon in its basement.

Dimly lit tunnels connect the various sublevels.

GMs should emphasize the magical nature of the site. The various Houses' magical gifts may contribute to the daily life of the Towers. The greenhouses may have small plots of magical herbs, the archives certainly hold grimoires of half-forgotten spells, and the building and tunnels may have passages that don't actually occupy physical space. Some rooms may not merely be guarded by human beings, or locked, but have spells of protection and concealment on them, or even be accessible only through magical portals.

On the level ground below the Towers, about three quarters of a mile away, is a walled village. Most of its people are farmers who grow the food and fiber for the Gifted and their servants, but it also has professionals, ranging from the blacksmith and seamstress to the seer, the healer, and the courtesan. Cultivated fields surround the village, with a radius of just under a mile. Further out are grasslands used for pasturage and forests visited by woodcutters and swineherds.

A few miles farther out is the boundary between order and chaos. There's no physical barrier to leaving the ordered lands of the Towers, but those who do have strange experiences and may come back changed. From time to time, intruders of various sorts slip over the borders.

Inhabitants

The world of the Towers has an elaborate social hierarchy, as stratified as a Hindu village but not as impenetrable as a caste system. The higher-ranking positions all call for abilities, such as spell casting, combat, or professional knowledge, and it's possible for someone with a talent for one of those abilities to advance socially. Occasional intermarriages among the different higher classes also take place.

Highest of all are the Gifted, ancient lineages that preserve magical talents and obscure knowledge. Their rituals protect the land from spiritual chaos. They also provide advice on lesser rituals that make daily life safer and serve as judges in the legal system of the Towers and the village. There are several distinct lineages, each with about 15 members. Realistically, after centuries of intermarriage, both their magical gifts and their physical appearances would all have mixed together, but each House's magic works to preserve its distinctive traits. The Council of heads of Houses is the ultimate legal authority over the Towers.

The Auxiliaries protect the physical safety of the Towers, samurai to the daimyo of the Gifted. Both young men and young women serve in the Auxiliaries, but women are expected to marry, and time spent on maternity leave tends to slow their military careers. Soldiers are divided into squads with a handful of members, each under the command of an optio. The least experienced soldiers stand watch on the roofs of the towers, warning their optios of any disturbance in the countryside. Older soldiers are stationed at the gates. Several squads have specialized duties: the Honor Squad attend the Gifted during rituals, the Wilderness Squad patrol the forests and inspect the boundaries, the Investigative Squad provide law enforcement in the village and patrol the tunnels, and the Administrative Squad keep records for the Auxiliaries. Two of the Gifted command this small force: the legate, an adult with military experience; and the tribune, a youth assigned to military service for training. Auxiliaries may have minor magical gifts, especially of sorts useful in battle; in *GURPS* terms, these can be defined as chi-based skills.

About 10-12 Magisters and their families live in the village. These are the professional class of the setting, each skilled in a particular profession or craft. They may have minor magical gifts connected with their professions; in *GURPS* terms, these are spells or minor powers.

About an equal number of Ministers head the servants in the Towers: the butler, the architect, the archivist, and so on. Among these are the teachers assigned to instruct the young Gifted in physical and mental skills necessary for their role. Ministers have to refer major decisions to the Council, but it's rare for any such decision to be overrules.

Below the Ministers are the Yeomen, farmers who hold their own land. They make up nearly two-thirds of the village's households, and their families number several hundred.

The Slaveys are the lesser servants in the Towers. A few of them have positions of privilege not much less than that of the Ministers -- for example, the cooks for the hall, the military mess, and the servants' dining area are influential. A few more develop close ties to specific Houses and work mainly for them. But most of them hold menial jobs that call for constant heavy labor. Private quarters are a rare privilege for a Slavey; many of them sleep on the floors of their workspaces, wrapped in blankets. There are as many Slaveys in the Towers as there are members of all the higher classes together.

Lowest in the hierarchy are the Groundlings, village laborers of several sorts. Many of them are farmhands, doing the heaviest work of the harvest and planting and weeding the crops. Others serve as herdsmen, porters, or day laborers on building jobs. Their best hope of advancing themselves is usually to get a son or daughter accepted as a Slavey. They make up about a third of the village's inhabitants.

There's yet another group of inhabitants, but one that has no official existence and no place in the hierarchy. The Invisibles live in hiding in the lower tunnels of the Towers. From day to day, they support themselves by stealing from the storehouses. They often know a few magical arts, typically to conceal themselves or bypass the magical safeguards that protect valuables. They also operate black and gray markets, often by silent barter: a Slavey can leave stolen or diverted goods in a certain location and come back to find other goods next to them, as a silent offering. Keeping them in check is one of the tasks of the Investigative Squad; on the other hand, it's rumored that some Houses may use them as spies or assassins.

This elaborate social structure can support troupe-style gaming, in which each player takes on two or more roles. One of these roles should be as a senior member of a Gifted House. The other could be a youth from such a house, preoccupied with school and courtship; an Auxiliary, with military duties; or a Minister or Slavey, trying to maneuver for a better position in the belowstairs hierarchy. GMs may want to consult with their players about which of these roles would provide the most interesting contrasts with the roles of the senior Gifted, and the best prospects for adventure -- or for other types of roleplaying, if they want a nonadventuring campaign focus.

Spirits

The great rituals serve to limit the powers of the spirits; but from time to time, various sorts of spirits make their way into the ordered lands. Often, they appear in material form, because part of the chaos of their realm is a thinning of the barrier between matter and spirit.

Outside the borders of the settled lands lies wilderness. Not only is it heavily forested, with narrow, twisting paths, but the geography itself is unstable; paths may close up behind travelers, or change direction, or the terrain may shift beneath their feet. Ordinary Area Knowledge, Navigation, and Tracking rolls give limited information because of this instability, and are made at a 3 penalty. A character with Absolute Direction can apply the +3 bonus to cancel this penalty. In addition, neither full daylight nor full darkness exists; rather, the land is under constant twilight (-4 to vision rolls).

The inhabitants of this land are equally unstable. Even species boundaries are blurred; the same being may be partly a person and partly an animal or plant. The savages of the wild lands survive by learning to take on suitable traits of other species. They're hostile to the settled lands, but too anarchic to take effective action against them as a group, and the protective rituals limit the powers of individual invaders.

Another threat comes from beneath the Towers. The realm beneath the earth is occupied by the dead. Regular rituals keep the peace with them, but not everyone who dies is offered such observances; in some cases, practitioners of forbidden magic may deliberately arrange to die without a funeral, hoping to come back. The deepest tunnels under the Towers actually have hidden doorways that lead to the realms of the dead, and a few of the Invisibles know how to travel there and even have understandings with some of the dead.

The tunnels also have living creatures in them, such as rats and bats. The restless dead can sometimes command them, as can some of the Invisibles, and a few of the Invisibles learn to take on these forms for their own purposes.

Finally, the Towers are not completely cut off from other settlements. Every two or three years, a small caravan comes in to trade, put on a show, and enjoy the comforts of life in a settlement. The traders are a miscellaneous lot, and some of them are likely to have unusual powers. Their visit can take up a session or two, and can be played either lightly, as comic relief, or darkly, as the invasion of a safe haven by a touch of primal terror.

Themes and Adventures

Depending on what best catches the interest of the players, GMs can use the Towers to run a variety of campaigns, each with different characters in the spotlight.

For a campaign of high-powered magic, the Gifted adults should be the principal characters. If the GM wants to explore magic from more than one perspective, Gifted youths can appear as secondary PCs. It could be interesting to have each player's secondary character come from a different House than his primary character, so that he gets to explore a view of magic that somebody else came up with.

Gifted adults are also suitable central characters for a campaign of political intrigue. Depending on the methods they use, Ministers, Invisibles, or even Auxiliaries might be plausible secondary characters.

A different style of political intrigue, in an aristocratic community, focuses on making political alliances through marriages. Gifted youths can play the starring role in this kind of romantic campaign, with a contrast being drawn with the more calculating approach of their parents and older relatives, who want to see that they marry someone useful to their House. GMs wanting to run this kind of campaign will want to take a look at the article "Invitation to the Dance," which could be used for a social event where such romantic alliances can be formed.

A more comedic view can be achieved with Slaveys as secondary PCs. GMs may want to model this kind of campaign on the classic British television series *Upstairs, Downstairs.*

For straight action/adventure, a GM might like to make one of the squads of the Auxiliaries into focal characters. The Auxiliaries aren't affiliated to specific Houses, but Gifted adults from diverse Houses can play a secondary role, coming along on missions to provide magical help. Most Auxiliaries are born and raised in military families, but there are annual competitions that anyone may enter, with permission to enlist as the prize; a soldier PC could be a Slavey or Groundling looking to better himself, a Yeoman's son or daughter wanting a more exciting life, or even an untalented or disaffected member of a Gifted House.

The Wilderness Squad is best suited as stars for this kind of campaign; their skills are useful in dangerous places, and they fit the pattern of being better soldiers in battle than on the parade ground. The Investigative Squad could also be the basis of a campaign, one following the "police procedural" model of fantasy stories by Randall Garrett (the Lord Darcy stories) and Terry Pratchett (some of the Discworld books). Either of these squads could be a suitable home for PCs who are misfits in regular military service.

Finally, a GM who wants to put the PCs in real trouble could focus a campaign on the founding of a new colony. What if the Towers have been experiencing overpopulation, and have a few too many young people to fit in? Sending them out to a rumored site in the wilderness, where they can set up a new compact with the local spirits, might both relieve the pressure and establish another community as an ally for the Towers. Naturally, the most talented young people

Inspirations

The concepts for this campaign framework come from a number of different games. The treatment of magical households is akin to that in *Ars Magica;* the historical framework could be taken as an alternative later history for *Exalted.* The treatment of magic owes something to both *Ars Magica* and *Big Eyes Small Mouth.* Readers of *GURPS Fantasy* will recognize the recurrence in this setting of some themes and concepts from its Roma Arcana setting.

A number of fictional sources also got stirred into the mix. The image of an isolated castle comes from Mervyn Peake's Gormenghast novels. The duality of upper and lower classes owes something to Peake, and something to *Upstairs, Downstairs.* Garth Nix's Abhorsen novels influenced the treatment of the distinction between wilderness magic and settled magic.

would get the assignment, perhaps aided by a squad of Auxiliaries looking for less boring duty, and by a few Slaveys who want to become Ministers in a hurry. This kind of campaign could show closer bonding between the different social strata as they face a common danger. Running a "new colony" campaign would provide elements of high ritual, wild adventure, romance, and resource management within a single framework.

Several of these campaign themes give PCs the chance to reshape their world, or even determine its fate. The setting is small enough to make this plausible.

Pyramid Review

Zombies!!! 5: School's Out Forever!

Published by **Twilight Creations, Inc.**

Written by Kerry Breitenstein & Todd A. Breitenstein with Mark Metzner

Illustrated by Dave Aikins

16 Map Tiles, 32 Event Cards, "Guts" Tokens, 4-Page Rules Sheet; $14.99

If you thought that with ***Zombies!!! 4: The End,*** it really was the end for the tile-laying, zombie-bashing, desperate-scramble-for-survival board game, then you were wrong. Rather, that acts as a bookend with ***Zombies!!!*** between which sit the two-and-a-half supplements available for the game. Which means that there is still room for other expansions, such as this, ***Zombies!!! 5: School's Out Forever!***

Like the other two expansions (but not the half), ***Zombies!!! 5: School's Out Forever!*** adds another area adjacent to the small town America depicted in ***Zombies!!!*** Like ***Zombies!!! 3: Mall Walkers***, it is also self-contained, which means that it can be played on its own as a mini-game, although it still needs the addition of the rules, dice, and various pawns and tokens from the core game. Of course, it is really intended to add another area to explore within the game, providing a possible avenue of escape from the corpse cortege.

Despite the subtitle -- "School's Out Forever!" -- it should be made clear that this supplement is not set within the halls and classrooms of a school. Now the subtitle is correct because school is interchangeable with college in American English, but reading it in English results in the expansion not being as advertised. This linguistic disappointment aside, it does mean that there is room still for a ***Zombies!!!*** Games set in a high school. Even so, the most obvious inspiration for the subtitle suggests that ***Zombies!!! 5*** is set in a high school.

Rather, it is set on the campus of a small town college, with the players running through its grounds, just as they do in the core game, ***Zombies!!! 2: Zombie Corps(e),*** and ***Zombies!!! 3: Mall Walkers.*** And as before, the aim is escape, because this college, also known as Twilight University, has its own helicopter and helipad.

The expansion consists of 16 new map tiles, 32 new Event cards, a set of "Guts" tokens, and the rules leaflet that also includes a short piece of color fiction. The tiles, which follow the game's standard nine-square grid format, depict locations such as the Administration Building, the "Dormatory," the Medical School, and Science Center. When used with the core game, they are kept in a separate pile with the college's helipad tile near the bottom. Only the Entrance tile and a Crossroads tile are removed, the latter added to the former when the Entrance tile is drawn from the main map tile deck. As soon as a player enters the university grounds, he can begin drawing from this expansion's tiles.

The new Event cards are drawn to ghoulish effect by Dave Aikins. They are not as humorous as in previous expansions or the core game, perhaps the best being "Student Loan," which allows a player to borrow an item currently in play (such as a weapon or vehicle) from another player and use it for a single turn. It is illustrated with a female student attacking a zombie with its now detached arm!

Several of the new Event cards relate to ***Zombies!!! 5's*** major new rule. Where Bullet tokens determines the amount of ammunition carried, and Heart tokens a player's health, the new blue "Guts" tokens represent his mental health. Beginning the game with three, a player can have as many as five, and as few as one. They are gained every time a six is rolled in combat, and lost when a one is rolled. So what do they do? Simply, Guts control how many Event cards a player can hold in his hand. At the end of his turn, if a player has fewer Guts tokens than Event cards, he must

discards so that they are equal. If he has more Guts tokens than cards, he can draw more cards at the beginning of his next turn.

What **Zombies!!! 5: School's Out Forever!** does not do is address the sprawling nature of the game. Indeed it exacerbates it, meaning that if you add everything to the core game, then you almost need a gymnasium floor just to lay it all out. Nor does it really add anything new in terms of playing area, whereas an expansion set in a high school might have done. The "Guts" mechanics do add a new twist to the tongue-out-through-the-cheek horror humor of the **Zombies!!!** Game. But again, they really just exacerbate the game's high luck factor, with bad luck limiting a player's options and good luck expanding them. All this increases the game's playing time, both because of the added area and the extra luck elements. The latter also increase the playing time when the "Guts" rules are used with just the core game.

If you were expecting **Zombies!!! 5: School's Out Forever!** to offer something radical, then the expansion will be a disappointment. If your expectations went only as far as more of the same, then it certainly delivers. Beyond that, the "Guts" rules are a new twist, being the expansion's only highlight, and not an unwelcome one. Overall, **Zombies!!! 5: School's Out Forever!** is a reasonable expansion, far superior to **Zombies!!! 3.5: Not Dead Yet,** offering more of the same for the **Zombies!!!** devotee.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Players Handbook II (for *Dungeons & Dragons*)

Published by Wizards of the Coast

Written by David Noonan

224-page four-color hardcover; $34.95

How much more information do players need for *Dungeons & Dragons?* The *Players Handbook II,* recently published by Wizards of the Coast, suggests that they can use quite a bit. This book offers up a number of new possibilities for players, suggests ways to make characters more believable and more focused on the game world, ways to beef up the reality of the environment, and, most importantly, ways to incorporate these suggestions into ongoing campaigns. Many of the suggestions here are grounded in making a particular class work better for the way many groups tend to play, adjusting several of the classes in ways that make them far more attractive to the typical player.

The book opens with a quartet of new classes, most focused on combat specialists. The beguiler is the exception here. This class works well in non-combat-intensive campaigns as a manipulator of opinions and creatures. Beguilers have a limited selection of spells, and gain bonuses toward making those spells effective against resistant creatures. Beguilers also blend in some ideas from the rogue class, with the ability to find and dismantle traps. The other three new classes -- dragon shaman, duskblade, and knight -- all tend more toward the martial side of the battlefield. Dragon shamans combine elements of fighters and clerics, with the added bonus of dragon-like abilities at higher levels. Duskblades feature a limited selection of spells, all of which can be used while the character wears armor and carries a shield, and those spells can be cast through the character's weapons. Knights, as the name implies, are chivalrous fighters who can boost the morale of fellows, call out enemies for single combat, and have good defensive capabilities. This comes at the expense of some basic abilities (attacking flat-footed opponents, for instance) that other character classes enjoy.

Additionally, suggestions are made to alter each of the 11 basic character classes as well as seven others from books like the *Complete Arcane II* and *Miniatures Handbook.* Possible basic genotypes are suggested for each class, giving the player an idea of how a particular class can be played. Additionally, most of these possibilities are given sample chunks of dialogue for use in-game. Just as importantly, each of these 18 classes has a suggested possible alteration in which one class feature is given up for a new one. In many cases, it can be a powerful choice, depending on the player. For example, sorcerers can give up the ability to call a familiar and can instead use metamagic feats more quickly. Paladins can give up the special mount in favor of more powerful smite attacks -- quite useful for a party that spends a lot of time in dungeons, where a horse is of little use.

Naturally, there is a substantial list of new feats as well. Many of these are designed for the new classes or new class features; others are for very focused, high-level characters who have followed a particular feat progression. Many of these are useful for a particular character concept and are good for players who want to really pinpoint a particular archetypal character. More interesting are the new types of feat offered. In addition to the new general and metamagic feats, the *Players Handbook II* offers feat tracks based on character lineage, fighting style, tactical outlook, and more. Again, these feats allow for a new level of focus for characters, allowing players to fully develop a PC down a specific pathway.

Where the book really shines is in addressing areas that have been conspicuously absent in many Wizards of the Coast products in the past: solid ideas for creating believable characters and advice for roleplaying those personae more effectively. Personality traits and possible backgrounds are suggested for each class, along with suggestions and dialogue ideas for conveying those traits and backgrounds in game. The second on table and game etiquette, while

common sense for experienced players, should be required reading for anyone new to the hobby.

The most interesting sections of the book are on the benefits of teamwork and retraining/rebuilding characters. While certain aspects of teamwork seem to make a fair bit of sense, the *Players Handbook II* codifies teamwork into, essentially, team feats that allow for greater flexibility or coordinated attacks. While an experienced group will have little trouble incorporating these ideas without the rules, it's a nice addition that makes sense for newer players, since it functions well within the constraints of the *d20 System.* The section on retraining is long overdue, and well-designed. This allows adventurers to dump skills, feats, spells, and other features that have outlived their usefulness in preference of new abilities. This involves a small monetary cost to the PC and some game time to accomplish, but again, these rules make particular sense, and free up those players who chose feats or spells in haste. After all, some feats look like a great idea on paper, but don't make a lot of sense for a particular character in the game itself. So, while there is a penalty for a poor choice, now players don't need to live with mistakes forever.

The book does fall short in a couple of places. The section on character affiliations, while interesting, has been covered at least in part in other books. Additionally, the suggestions for how to run groups those characters can belong to are, for lack of a better word, arcane at best. These ideas can certainly spice up a game and add a lot of intrigue and realism, but also appear to complicate matters needlessly in a lot of ways. In short, the suggested uses for affiliations and organizations leave to chance a number of decisions that could just as easily be handled by the gamemaster without rolling a d20. And while it does speed things up, handling a battle, espionage, or negotiations between two groups with a single d20 roll puts a lot of fate into a single toss of the die.

Additionally, some material seems to have been left out. For instance, one of the paladin variations suggests looking on the accompanying "Paladin Battlecries" sidebar, which, bluntly, doesn't exist. The appendix on creating NPCs and PCs on the fly is handy, but was included in lieu of a badly needed index. A couple of full-page pieces of art could have been sacrificed for that index as well, and this oversight makes the *Players Handbook II* much more difficult to use. It's ironic that a book with so many useful hints on streamlining the game presents information in a way that's hard to locate quickly.

Overall, this is a worthwhile book for serious *Dungeons & Dragons* gamers. There are a number of excellent suggestions here that will make the gaming experience a lot more enjoyable for many players, will make certain character classes much more attractive, and will add both depth and breadth to many campaigns.

--Steve Honeywell

Shadows and Fogg, Part the First

'"Well do it, then!'
'Go around the world in 80 days?'
'Yes!'
'All right then.'
'Starting when?'
'Starting now.'"
-- Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days,* Chapter I

Summer's here, and it's time for a trip. This time, we're not merely going [across the country](#), we're going around the world. And who better to guide us than the master of the Extraordinary Voyage himself, Jules Verne? This series of columns takes his great novel *Around the World in Eighty Days* as its core artifact. (You can get it [online](#) if you haven't read it before.) In addition to the standard secret-historical approach to Verne, his novel, and his character, we'll use the luxury of vacation stretch to apply the novel to our "[Transmission 200](#)" time-war setting.

This will hopefully not only reveal the novel as worthy of our particular brand of eliptonic scrutiny, but also provide a kind of in-depth case study that GMs and setting builders can use as a model (or itinerary) for their own obsessive workings. Like Phileas Fogg with his ledger, I'll be marking down a few notions of correspondence where they strike me, keeping us up to date on our progress through the forest of symbols. And finally, this exercise will also end up giving some nice little hooks (and, if desired, a largish piece of metaplot or backstory) to link into existing or ongoing steampunk, Victorian-era, or later games. PCs can replace Fogg and company, aid them, obstruct them, attempt to beat their time, or merely keep stumbling across Fogg's footprints on their own adventures. So, let's be off, and bon voyage to us.

" The latter was an enigmatic figure about whom nothing was known, except that he was a thorough gentleman . . . Although clearly British, Mr Fogg might not have been a Londoner. . . . In sum, he was not a member of any of the associations that breed so prolifically in the capital of the United Kingdom, from the Harmonic Union to the Entomological Society, founded chiefly with the aim of exterminating harmful insects."
-- Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days,* Chapter I

There are two surviving (and one suggestively lost) manuscripts of *Around the World in Eighty Days,* one of which dates the beginning of the journey as 1858 rather than 1872. Although we should probably continue to assume 1872 as the target year for the Fogg Working, we'll keep a weather eye on the earlier year. (But that would explain why Fogg reads *The Morning Chronicle,* which ceased publication in 1862.) The 1858 mention may have been a shadow or backlash cast by the successful Fogg operation, or a rehearsal, or even an attempted counter-op remaining faintly visible in the documentary record. It also might have been the real operation, with Verne's novel a cunningly disguised bit of disinformation -- in which case, Fogg could not have used conventional terrestrial technology to circle the earth. An 1858 voyage would have depended rather on [secret airships](#), tunneling machines, or dips into the hollow earth or hyperspace -- not to mention traveling through the aftermath of the Sepoy Mutiny in India and the ongoing battles in Kansas, Utah, and elsewhere in an America without a transcontinental railroad. It also becomes far more likely that Fogg is working against Argus, perhaps to "make straight the way" for the [Emperor Norton](#), who is crowned in 1859.

With that said, the parallels between the series of "eruptions" visible in Orion starting on February 4, 1872 and the repeated "skyquakes" heard in the skies over Britain in November of 1858 become interesting. Did the sound travel faster than the light of the irruption, or do we have cause and effect backward? (If the 1858 event is a backlash from the successful 1872 Working, perhaps that explains it.) Either way, the fiery displays in the northern sky serve as omens of the upcoming struggle, or perhaps static discharge thrown backward from the energies of the Working.

Verne begins his novel (or his edition of Fogg's report, or his disinformation propaganda, or his forensic reconstruction of the Working, but we'll stick with "novel" for simplicity's sake) in space-time: "In the year 1872, [at] No. 7 Savile Row, Burlington Gardens," which is to say, in the West End of London. His hero, Mr. Fogg, "might not have been a Londoner," but was "clearly British." So who, among our cast of conspirators, does Fogg work for? Verne states

boldly that he is not a member of the Harmonic Union, which to me would seem to rule out the Lemurians. Nor is he one of the "Entomological Society, founded chiefly with the aim of exterminating harmful insects," which is as neat a description of Argus from *GURPS Black Ops* as I've ever seen. In short, Fogg's membership is probably the obvious, the occult secret service MI-   , the legacy of John Dee. He seeks, for some reason, to "throw a girdle round about the earth" as [Puck](#) does in service to Oberon, though he takes eighty days rather than forty minutes. However, Fogg's relationship with his club is fraught; they become his adversaries and opponents in the Voyage. This could indicate that Fogg is another example of the alarming tendency of MI-   agents to go rogue, or to develop highly eccentric individual agendas. Certainly the entire novel is a tale of a man who suddenly goes off the rails (and who literally goes off them twice).

"In the different phases of his existence, this gentleman gave the impression of being perfectly balanced in all his parts, weighted and poised, as flawless as a chronometer by Leroy or Earnshaw. The truth was that Phileas Fogg was precision personified."
-- Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days,* Chapter II

So who -- and what -- *is* Phileas Fogg? He gets his first name from the obscure St. Phileas, or possibly from a Greek-French pun *philé* meaning "lover" and *as* meaning "ace" in French. (That said, Phileas Fogg and Passepartout are obviously the Magus and sacred Fool, setting out on their journey through the Tarot.) Thus, the card-loving Phileas Fogg becomes a "lover of aces." (One researcher claims to have discovered a 5th century B.C. Greek author named Phileas who wrote a *Periplus,* or *Voyage,* but although suggestive, there aren't enough details to say of what.) His last name most likely stemmed from one W.P. Fogg, of Cleveland, Ohio, who traveled around the world in 1869-1871. Or did it? The Cleveland Fogg could be another blowback echo, or a precursor, or a rehearsal. Advance scouting or misdirection laid down by an allied Argus? Or magical ambushes set in place by an Argus less well-disposed to Fogg and MI-   ? We're not really sure who the protagonist is, so we can't really say who the antagonists are, just yet.

Phileas Fogg is a compulsive whist player, a man of strict schedule and no visible emotion. He is described in the novel as "a genuine piece of machinery," "a real machine," "made of wrought iron," with "the grace and spontaneity of an automaton," and one who "appeared no more moved than the chronometers on board." This leads one to the assumption of Fogg as a clockwork or cybernetic automaton, substituting whist perhaps for [the Turk's](#) chess as a decision-making software. In Verne's early story "Master Zacharius," the titular watchmaker puts part of his soul into his clocks; could Fogg be a final attempt by Zacharius to transmigrate himself into an immortal gear-driven body? We also note in passing his strong resemblance to Lord Byron, albeit to "one who might have lived a thousand years without ever growing old." (This kind of thing gives wing to C.J. Beiting's excellent essay ["Phileas Fogg -- International Man of Mystery,"](#) which identifies Fogg as spy, time traveler, vampire, or robot, and is well worth perusing not least for comprehensive *GURPS* stats and for a summary of the novel.)

I also note Fogg's insistence that "the unforeseen does not exist," and his announced intention to "jump -- mathematically" from trains to steamers and so forth. Fogg here seems more familiar with hyperspace than with normal space -- could he be a [Sphinx](#)? He is imperturbable and inscrutable, after all. Fogg might also be an immortal, with a perspective like that -- a Reptoid, or even a [Frankenstein's](#) monster (since he has no known family, and at least one chronicler has dated *The Horror of Frankenstein* internally to 1858) or other form of bioroid. While we're on the subject of automata, it seems that Verne, interestingly, suffered intermediate attacks of facial paralysis. And he wrote two novels a year for 40 years straight. Do you smell smoke? Do you hear the sound of gears jamming?

"I am the most unknown of men."
-- Jules Verne, letter to Mario Turiello (April 10, 1895)

And we'll never know, because Verne burned all his personal papers in 1898. The author Michel Lamy theorizes that Jules Verne was a member of a secret artistic collective, Le Brouillard, or the Angelic Society. Per Lamy, Verne left hints about his membership in this Rosicrucian organization throughout his work (Rose-Croix = Robur the Conqueror, for example), and many of his novels such as *Journey to the Center of the Earth* and (of course) *Around the World in Eighty Days* can be read as initiatory journeys. The word *brouillard* also means clouds, or fog. In a 1903 interview, Verne said "I do attach certain importance to them . . . Yes, there is importance in names." If Lamy is on to something, then the choice of Fogg is significant. Verne added, "and when I found 'Fogg' I was very pleased and proud. And it

was very popular. It was considered a real *trouvaille.* And yet Fogg -- Fogg -- that means nothing but *brouillard.* But it was especially Phileas that gave such value to the creation."

We must needs leave the postulated Brouillard society at bay, here, save to note that any of the quantum organizations in our time war setting might be considered "foggy," since their history (and occasionally their agenda) remains unsettled, inchoate, and clouded over by constant timeline shifts. Verne himself was a good client of the strangely esoteric-minded Orleanist line of the French royal family. His own family lineage comes from Provins, the old Templar stronghold. And he was something of a protégé of Victor Hugo, the Grand Master of the Prieuré de Sion -- and the artist Jean Cocteau, likewise Grand Master of the Prieuré, duplicated Fogg's journey in 1936. Verne's 1896 novel *Clovis Dardentor* contains not just an echo of the Merovingian king Clovis, but a character (Captain Bugarach) named after a landscape feature near Rennes-le-Château.

Of course, Verne had a great fondness for geographic names. In the final version, Fogg's valet Passepartout is named from the French words for "go anywhere" or "skeleton key," a highly significant cryptological clue in its own right. But in one of the earlier versions, the valet is named "Jean Fernandes," which is an interesting connection to another Verne obsession, the desert island. The original Robinson Crusoe, Alexander Selkirk, was marooned on the Juan Ferndandez Islands off the coast of Chile. What's the connection between this mysterious island and the Fogg Working? We cannot know for sure, but it must be deep. Elsewhere in the draft, Passepartout is named "Jean Fricaudet," which may come from a French word meaning "plot." And Inspector Fix, of course, is attempting to "fix" the problem posed by Fogg and Passepartout, whatever it is.
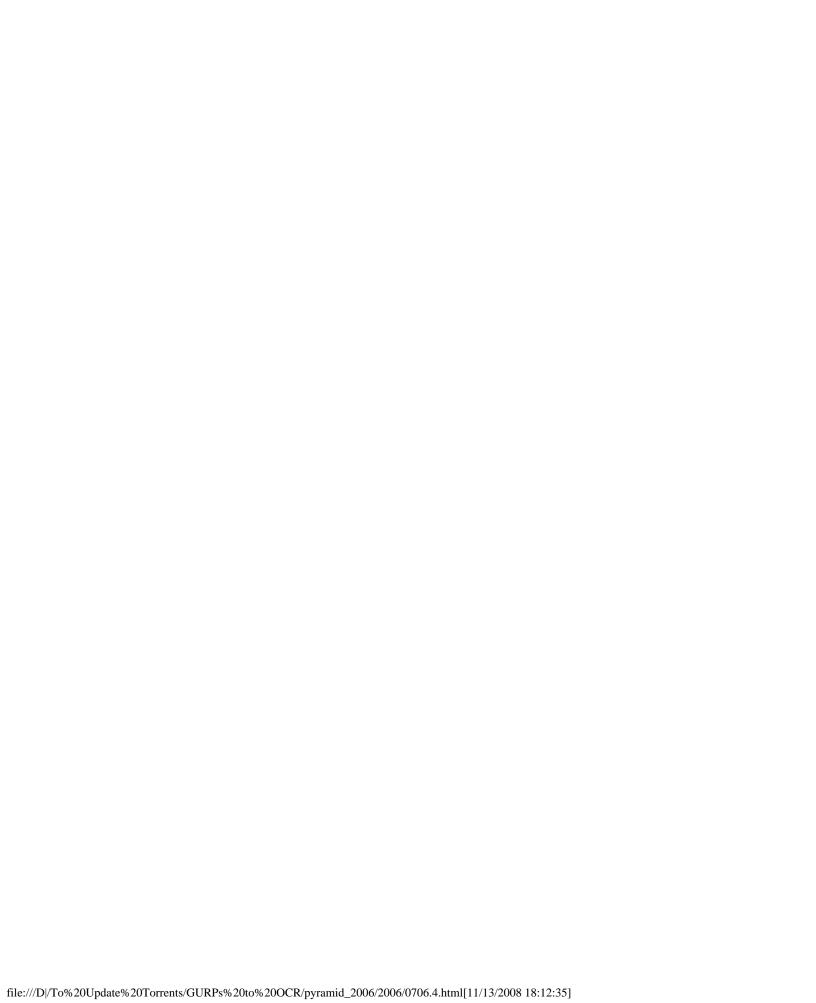
"Do you know, Mr. Passepartout, that this so-called journey in 80 days might easily be the cover for some secret assignment . . . "
-- Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days,* Chapter IX

One can measure a circle beginning anywhere, but Phileas Fogg begins his circle at the Reform Club. And so Fogg set out from London, on October 2, 1872 (as the novel has it), at 8:45 p.m., with only Saturn in the sky, but with the Sun, Moon, and changeable Mercury all together on the other side of the world. This is the cusp between the first and second decans of Libra. In **GURPS Cabal** terms, the cusp between Naôth and Marderô, or between communication and revolution. As a decanic backdrop for a novel of sudden change, it is an interesting choice -- almost as interesting as Verne's decision to give the novel 37 chapters, one more than the decanic cycle of the year. If we assume that the first chapter and last chapter both correspond to Naôth, we can build the entire decanic cycle into the novel's structure. Alternatively, Verne lays out eight legs for Fogg's journey in Chapter III, which would correspond to the eightfold turning of the year -- again, a complete yearly circle measured in 80 days. Although October 2 falls in the "season" of Mabon, in the novel, the first leg thematically corresponds more closely to Lugnasadh, the time of preparation. And Fogg himself breaks his voyage down into 12 legs in his journal -- paralleling the 12 signs of the zodiac, and another turning of the annual wheel. London to Paris thus becomes Libra, the initial balance -- of Fogg's life, of the magical order, of conspiratorial power -- prior to upset.

And upset it is. A bare five days after Fogg's October 1872 departure, our old friend [Spring-Heeled Jack](#) runs rampant in the London neighborhood of Peckham, and continues his depredations for two months. (In 1858, rains of insects fall from Mortagne, France, to Warsaw, Poland. Simultaneously, the Foggishly mechanical savant and chess champion Paul Morphy toured Europe.) Time begins to fold -- the bank robbery takes place variously on September 28 and September 29 in different chapters of the novel. And although his schedule reports stops in Paris, Turin, and Brindisi, Phileas Fogg remains resolutely off stage while a series of intricate nested flashbacks ends with a telegram sent recursively into an earlier chapter. Verne is opening up the "wide gap of time" in his own way. Fogg has vanished out of time, space, and the narrative -- he is free to pursue a secret agenda. Although the novel notes Fogg's arrival at Suez on October 9, it would no doubt be the work of a moment for an MI-   agent to double back and intercept a fallen meteorite in Soko-Banja, Serbia on October 13, 1872 (when Fogg was ostensibly off Mocha in Yemen). This meteorite was composed, so the local scientific experts discovered, of an unknown mineral they called banjite. A second meteorite, of the same mineral, hit 17 years later in the nearby town of Jelica -- and after Verne's death, a manuscript called *The Hunt for the Meteor* was discovered amongst his effects.

Next: Shadows and Fogg, Part the Second: In Which We Encounter Death And The Maiden

Here's a Paradigm; Call Someone Who Cares

For the past few hours I've been training my replacement at my current temp job. While bittersweet (less on the bitter part because it's not like I'm being let go, so much as fleeing the state), it's nevertheless an exciting time . . . and not just because I feel the urge to leave all kinds of information-bombs in my protegé. ("Okay, you see Melinda there? She likes to be called 'Lotta Thunder.'")

Nevertheless, it's been something of a jarring experience. This is primarily because I'm having a hard time determining what information and context my replacement -- a good quarter-century my senior -- and I share. For example, even though she was computer literate -- in the sense that she could turn on the computer, wasn't afraid of the mouse, and so on -- she's not a "power user." Things like "Find/Replace" or "Copy/Paste" don't flow as naturally from her fingers as they do mine.

In thinking about this, I realized that the difficulty may well come with my day-to-day familiarity with computers. I'm utterly unafraid of them (sometimes dangerously so . . . more than once I've realized the error of my misplaced "del *.* /s" mere seconds too late), More importantly, I have an understanding of the fundamental aspects of computers. I know what a "Next" button does, or an "X" box in the corner or a shortcut listed on a menu. The notion of "copy/paste" has been a part of my day-to-day existence for over half my life; even the Windows environment is only a couple years shy of that 50% benchmark. (And it's sobering to think that there are adults today who could have been born during the "1984" Macintosh commercial, having lived an entire life as an Appleite[1].)

What's interesting, however, is how the current computer paradigms we enjoy nowadays are very recent in the great scheme of things. For example, I'm probably part of the last generation who was expected to dabble in programming when getting into computers. (Practically my entire middle-school and high-school computer education was devoted to BASIC and various computer-science concepts, since the notion of using a computer was near-synonymous with programming it.)

What I've been contemplating over the past few hours, then, is this notion of the paradigm -- the point where things change, and where one group of people are completely comfortable with one way of doing things, and another group is either only comfortable with the old ways, or only adapt grudgingly to the new. You'd be hard-pressed to find an office worker who was utterly unable to deal with computers. (As a curious counterexample, my wife and I *did* encounter a car dealer that, to the best of my knowledge, had no computers whatsoever . . . paper invoices, typewriters, etc. It took them three days to get back to us with some trivial information about a car -- by which point we had already purchased a vehicle elsewhere. If this datum is indicative, I suspect they won't be around forever.)

There are a fair number of points that I can think of in history where these new ideas spread to this great extent, where an "adapt or die" mentality was widespread, but I suspect they're rarer than might be believed. Sure, the advent of the airplane made it possible transverse great distances in a few hours rather than weeks, but it was possible simply not to travel via that means. I presume the rise of the railroad had greater implications, as the noisy, rapid-moving vessels rolled through town with such a presence that they could scarcely be ignored.

I suspect the point at which slavery was outlawed might have marked a similar radical shift between the Before and After, although -- at least in America's South -- this outlook change was sadly mitigated by the reclassification of workers from "employees we don't pay because they're not free to leave" to "employees we pay so little that they have few options to leave."

Although we don't think of it much nowadays, there have been a number of times in human history where military developments have radically altered the outlook between those before and after the paradigm shift. Most recently the events of September 11th awakened Americans to a style of warfare that has been endured by other parts of the world for decades. Before that, the rise of portable firearms, as did gunpowder itself centuries before and the rise of cavalry years before that. No longer was one safe in one's own village; death could come from a hip pocket, from a mortar, from the thunder of hooves the next hill over. (Oddly enough, most such military advances nowadays don't affect our

day-to-day interactions; after all, who cares if a nuclear bomb can destroy a city or a continent? The use of either one would qualify as a Bad Day.)

Outside the field of battle, there have been a few other points of this "paradigm shift." One of the earliest I can think of would be when the notion of currency was first catching on; it's entirely likely that -- in many parts of the world -- you'd have many people who simply wouldn't accept these embossed metal disks in exchange for something useful, like chickens.

In pondering the currency example, think it's likely that many of the recent radical outlook revisions have stemmed from the extension of the human life cycle coupled with the reduction of the "gestation" time of new ideas. For example, if it takes 50 years for currency to catch on, then anyone used to the barter-only system would have died off in the interim. Compare this to computers, which have gome from a Buck-Rogers fantasy to desktop realities in a matter of a few decades; entire generations have been forced to adapt or fall behind.

I think the emergence of computers has been on my mind lately because of my uncertainty of the future. Will there come a time when *I'm* the one on the rocking chair, uncomprehending of how to reroute the positrons on these newfangled robomachines? (I think Penny Arcade hit the nail on the head [last December](.) I hope and suspect not, since the past couple of generations have gotten accustomed to a *pace* of learning and adaptation that -- hopefully -- exceeds the actual advances we've made. The realization that "sending a document quickly" has gone from telegraph to next-day mail to fax machine to e-mail over the span of a few decades preps us for the notion that, "Golly gee wilikers, the way we send a document quickly might change again." On the other hand, I'm not entirely convinced of this. For example, I've heard reports that the Kids These Days view e-mail as something of a dinosaur, preferring to do most communication over instant messenger. Reading these articles, I begin to respond with a glaring, "Bah! The kids these days; don't they understand that the . . ." and then I catch myself, horrified by the realizations of what I'm saying.

Even so, I still hope I'm not quite extinct yet. For one thing, I am at least *familiar* with what instant messaging is; I don't keep Gaim open 24/7, but I *could,* if there was a good enough reason (or large enough basket of money). And I still like dabbling in new technology. I've got a blog; I'm considering going sans land line in our new apartment (perhaps going with a cell-phone and VoIP combo). To quote Walter Stratford from *10 Things I Hate About You,* "I'm down, I've got the 411, and you are not going out and getting jiggy with some boy. I don't care how dope his ride is!"

There's nothing so constant as change, and adapting to all manner of alterations to the way things are is one of the things that humanity, as a whole, does quite well. Individual humans, however, often have a much rougher time.

I used copy/paste seven times to craft that previous paragraph, and I haven't touched the mouse once while writing this column.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

[1] Yes, for those of you seeking to correct a seeming error, I know Apple computers have been around longer than the 1984 launch of the Mac. My first computer was an Apple IIgs, and my first five years of computer training were on Apple IIes . . . and it's quite a humbling experience to compile a Pascal program using nothing more than two 5.25" floppy drives.

![?]

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

![?]

![?]

The Rich Are Different

for *GURPS*

by Stephen Dedman

"The rich are different than you and me."
"Yes, they have more money."
--F. Scott Fitzgerald & Ernest Hemingway

Many men of course became extremely rich, but this was perfectly natural and nothing to be ashamed of because no one was really poor -- at least no one worth speaking of.
-- Douglas Adams, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*

The love of money is the root of a great many games, and many player characters (and players) seem obsessed with accumulating wealth. Even those who aren't may occasionally find themselves in need of money. At such times, it is often easiest to go straight to those who already have plenty of it, in the hope of patronage, charity, a loan, or (more often) someone to rob, swindle, or blackmail.

With this in mind, here is a collection of filthy-rich NPCs designed for use as patrons, contacts, enemies, allies, or victims. Each one is designed with a particular cultural background in mind, but requires only minor changes to adapt for almost any setting where money still means power.

Joseph Allerton *(Cliffhangers/Wild West)*

Like many men, 19-year-old Joseph Allerton came to San Francisco in 1849 in search of gold. Unlike most, he found enough to make him rich. Even more unusually, he managed to consistently increase his wealth over the next decade as all of his investments paid off, despite his tendency to leave the job of reading contracts and balance sheets to his employees. Part of his success can be attributed to the fact that most people instinctively like him, but most of it can only be explained away with incredible luck.

Allerton lives in a suite in one of the hotels he owns, the Sovereign, but can often be found tending bar at one of his less expensive saloons, the Pacific, a knife's throw from the notorious Barbary Coast. The Pacific offers a free lunch to clients; there is also a bunkhouse behind the hotel for the homeless. Like many bartenders, Allerton is a good listener, and hears many tales of woe. If he has a good or better reaction to a customer, he may arrange for them to be given what they most need -- such as medical care, tools (but not weapons), a good second-hand suit of clothes, a job in one of his businesses, a scholarship, a 2nd class train ticket or steerage passage back home . . . almost any type of reasonable aid, but never cash. (He has a particular soft spot for "soiled doves," Asians, and unsuccessful prospectors: +1 to reaction rolls). These gifts are always anonymous; few, if any, of the recipients ever trace them back to their source. Allerton also owns a large number of clinics and hospitals in San Francisco which accept charity cases and don't ask embarrassing questions.

Allerton's business interests are protected by his loyal multi-ethnic staff. He has little idea of the extend of his own empire, which is effectively run by his Chinese accountant, Shui Ta. Any attempt to rob or defraud Allerton will incur the wrath of the Chinatown tongs, who will send hatchetmen to recover the loot.

Campaign uses: Allerton is intended as a "guardian angel" for heroes when things go horribly wrong -- in effect, a Favor or even a one-shot Patron. PCs may also find work in the Pacific or the Sovereign, especially if they speak more than one language at Accented or Native level. Because of Allerton's Weirdness Magnet disadvantage, the Pacific is also a regular haunt of strange beings and a good place to hear bizarre rumors -- particularly useful in a Deadlands campaign.

Robbing Allerton is pointless as well as dangerous; he carries little cash, having invested nearly all of his wealth.

Other settings: A secretly wealthy philanthropist and patron of the arts like Allerton might be found in any era where luck and money are still useful, providing the PCs with anything from shoes to starships.

Joseph Allerton   *250 points*

Ht 6'2," Wt 170 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 38.

Appearance: Tanned complexion, shaggy blond hair, bright blue eyes; a rangy man with large hands and a large chin.

Languages: English (Native). TL: 5. Cultural Familiarity: Homeline.

Attributes: **ST** 12 [20]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 12 [20]. [40 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29; HP 12 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 12 [10]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 5.5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]. [10 points]

Advantages and Perks: Appearance (Attractive) [5], Charisma/3 [15], Honest Face [1], Independent Income/1 [1], Status +2 [0, free from wealth], Super Luck (100), Wealth (Multimillionaire/1) [75]. [197 points].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Alcohol Intolerance [-1], Becomes Confused when Drunk [-1], Broad-Minded [-1], Charitable [-15], Congenial [-1], Dyslexia [-10], Easy to Read [-10], Loves theatre and opera [-1], Post-Combat Shakes [-5], Weirdness Magnet [-15]. [-58 points]

Skills and Techniques: Brawling (E) DX [2]-11; Carousing (A) HT+1 [4]-13; Fishing (E) Per+1 [2]-12; Gambling (A) IQ+3 [12]-13; Guns/TL5 (Pistol) (E) DX [1]-10; Merchant (A) IQ [2]-10; Packing (A) IQ+1 [4]-11; Professional Skill (Bartender) (A) IQ+1 [4]-11; Prospecting/TL5 (A) IQ+4 [16]-14; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-10; Scrounging (E) Per+1 [1]-12; Sex Appeal (A) HT [2]-12; Streetwise (A) IQ [2]-10; Survival (Hills) (A) Per [2]-12; Swimming (E) HT [1]-12; Teamster (A) IQ+1 [4]-11. [60 points]

Gear: Revolver, .36.

Eli Fox *(Banestorm/Fantasy)*

Eli Fox was the fourth in a long line of successful goldsmiths and bankers. Unfortunately, his hopes of carrying on the dynasty were dashed when, at the age of 12, he was castrated by a sadistic and impulsive footpad who robbed and murdered his father and was disappointed by the haul. Young Eli survived the attack thanks to magical healing; ever since he has hated thieves and admired magicians.

Without the normal distractions of adolescence, Eli concentrated on learning his trade from his grandfather, and soon won fame as a creator of beautiful bejeweled items as well as a canny merchant and moneylender. He was 24 when his grandfather died, leaving him the family business. After this, Eli began devoting more of his time to finding gems that would make good powerstones for his magic-using friends.

Eli still runs a successful bank, but his real love is in creating jewelry, greatly increasing the value of the silver, gold, and gems that he buys. His fortified and magically warded house is crammed with treasures, but Eli spends little of his money on himself; he eats well (when not distracted by work), but his bedroom is as spartan as a monk's cell, and he owns fewer clothes than the poorest of his apprentices. Miserly as he seems, he does make sure his sisters and their families lack nothing they need. He also sponsors young but talented magic-users, pays his taxes without complaint, and helps provide for the city watch as part of his crusade against thieves. The Thieves' Guild also watches him, looking for a weakness they can exploit, but as yet they haven't found one.

Campaign uses: Eli Fox may be a Patron for a magician, an Enemy for a thief, or a very useful Business Contact for anyone in Yrth. He may also be a source of ready-made magical items, or a buyer for any precious metals or gems the PCs may have obtained legitimately (he will not buy anything he believes to have been stolen from a fellow citizen). His bank stores treasure as well as lending money, but only to those who Fox considers honest and reliable (good or better reaction roll): his house also contains an alchemist's workshop, and his guest rooms are often occupied by wizards as well as his apprentices, clerks, and guards.

Much of Fox's wealth (and that of his clients) is kept in his house; his jeweler's workshop always contains 1d+1 pounds (weight) of gold, and gems worth 2d+1 × $1,000; his vaults always contain at least $30,000 in gold and silver coins, and 1d-1 powerstones of different sizes, as well as any treasures he's storing for his clients. The alchemical workshop contains 2d-2 elixirs as well as the (valuable but less portable) equipment of a professional lab. Fox is a difficult mark for swindlers, but even tougher to rob: he keeps geese as guards, as well as human sentries, and it's rumored that some of the statues in the building are actually stone or metal golems and that he can also summon elementals to defend his property. He rarely leaves his house, and when he does, he is accompanied by guards and carries no more than $100 in coin.

Other settings: Fox is intended for use in a fantasy campaign, but could be encountered in any settings where magic works. In a non-magical world, his belief in magic may be a Delusion that can be exploited by the unscrupulous. Alternatively, the PCs may be laboring under the Delusion that magic doesn't work, and be very surprised when they're suddenly surrounded by golems.

Eli Fox   140 points

5'6," 270 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 56.

Appearance: pale complexion, small blue eyes hidden by rolls of fat, a mane of silver hair but no beard or moustache.

Languages: Anglish (Native). [0 points] TL: 3. Cultural Familiarity: Yrth.

Attributes: **ST** 8 [-20]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 10 [0]. [60 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-3/1d-2; BL 13; HP 10 [4]; Will 13 [0]; Per 14 [5]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]. [9 points]

Advantages and Perks: Acute Vision/2 [4], Eidetic Memory [5], High Manual Dexterity/4 [20], Magic Resistance/2 [4], Reputation (patron of the magical arts, +2 to reaction rolls, all magicians in city (small class), always recognized) [3], Status +1 [0; +1 Status free with Wealth], Talent (Business Acumen)/2 [20], Wealth (Very Wealthy) [30] [86 points].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Attentive [-1], Enemy (Thieves' Guild, Watcher, 12 or less) [-15], Eunuch [-1], Fat [-3], Gluttony (15) [-2], Greed (15) [-7], Honesty (12) [-10], Miserliness (9) [-15], No Sense of Humor [-10], Proud [-1], Reputation (crusader against thieves, -2 to reaction rolls, all members of Thieves' Guild (small class), always recognized) [-3]. [-68 points].

Skills and Techniques: Accounting (H) IQ+2 [4]-15*; Alchemy (VH) IQ-1 [4]-12; Artist (Drawing) (H) IQ [4]-13, (Calligraphy) (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Detect Lies (H) IQ [4]-13; Diplomacy (H) IQ-2 [1]-11; Finance (H) IQ+2 [8]-16*; First Aid/TL3 (E) IQ [1]-13; Jeweler/TL3 (H) IQ+1 [16]-16; Knife (E) DX [1]-11; Merchant (A) IQ+2 [4]-16*; Metallurgy/TL3 (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ+1 [2]-14; Teaching (A) IQ [1]-12; Wrestling (A) DX-1 [1]-10. [53 points]

* +2 for Business Acumen

Gear: Large knife, fine quality, enchanted with Accuracy and Puissance spells (+1 to hit and damage). Outside his

house, wears formal robe enchanted with Fortify (DR 2) and Missile Shield spells.

Marcus Lucius Raptes *(Imperial Rome)*

Marcus Lucius Raptes was born a slave on his master's vineyard in AD 22, but gradually rose to a trusted position in his master's household, initially because of his skill as a cook. As his master's house became famous for his dishes as well as its wine, Lucius rose to dominate the kitchen, and then the household, and soon gained an understanding of his master's finances as well. His master, childless, bequeathed much of his fortune to Lucius, who quickly expanded the business empire to include laundries, hairdressing saloons, brothels, a profitable fire brigade, imported luxury foodstuffs, and buying and selling slaves.

Though careful with his money, Lucius is no miser, preferring to enjoy his wealth by indulging in fine food, wine, and prostitutes. As a former slave, he's still regarded as a second-class citizen by most people; this irks him, though he's careful not to show it except with occasional displays of extravagance, such as his entourage of former gladiators (including several women). It particularly pleases him when higher-status but less-wealthy Pompeiians come to his house for food and gossip or, best of all, have to turn to him for favors or advice.

Campaign uses: Lucius would be an effective Enemy in an *Imperial Rome* campaign, but his knowledge of the business worlds of Pompeii and Herculaneum would also make him a useful Contact. While he is unlikely to become an Ally or Patron, he might well be the PCs' employer, and he occasionally grants Favors -- though usually in the form of information or services (such as transportation in one of his merchant ships, entertainment in one of his brothels, or a loan of some slaves) rather than cash.

PCs tempted to rob Lucius will find it dangerous and probably unrewarding; he carries little money, and always travels with at least four litter-bearers who also act as bodyguards. His home is richly decorated, but most of his valuables will be easily recognized and hard to fence. Swindling him is more likely to pay off: Lucius is superstitious enough that a convincing fortune teller might persuade him to invest in a scam. If he catches on, though, the swindlers may find themselves ambushed by a dozen ex-gladiators, and wake up chained to oars in a galley.

Other settings: A self-made magnate like Lucius might be encountered in any society where the upper class feel contempt for the "nouveau riche."

Marcus Lucius Raptes   *130 points*

Ht 5'8," Wt 290 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 52.

Appearance: Fat, with an olive complexion, curly dark gray hair, and dark brown eyes.

Languages: Latin (Native). TL: 2. Cultural Familiarity: Homeline.

Attributes: **ST** 12 [20]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 9 [-10]. [50 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24; HP 11 [0]; Will 13 [5]; Per 12 [0]; FP 9 [0]; Basic Speed 5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]. [5 points]

Advantages and Perks: Alcohol Tolerance [1], Status +1 [0; +1 Status free with Wealth], Talent (Business Acumen)/2 [20], Talent (Smooth Operator)/1 [15], Wealth (Very Wealthy) [30] [66 points].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Callous [-5], Careful [-1], Chauvinistic [-1], Fat [-3], Gluttony (9) [-7], Greed (9) [-22], Lecherousness (15) [-7], Proud [-1], Superstitious [-1], Social Stigma (Second-class citizen) [-5]. [-48 points].

DD Skills: Accounting (H) IQ+2 [4]-14*; Acting (A) IQ+1 [2]-13†; Administration (A) IQ+3 [4]-15†; Area Knowledge (Pompeii) (E) IQ [2]-13; Brawling (E) DX [1]-11; Carousing (E) HT+3 [4]-12†; Cooking (E) IQ+4 [8]-

16; Current Affairs/TL2 (People) (E) IQ+2 [4]-14; Detect Lies (H) Per+1 [4]-13†; Diplomacy (H) IQ+1 [4]-13†; Farming (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Finance (H) IQ+2 [4]-14*; Fast-Talk (A) IQ+1 [2]-13†; Housekeeping (E) IQ [2]-12; Intimidation (A) Will+1 [2]-14†; Market Analysis (H) IQ+2 [4]-14*; Merchant (A) IQ+1 [4]-15*; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ+2 [2]-14†; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-12; Streetwise (A) IQ [1]-12†. [55 points]

* +2 for Business Acumen
† +1 for Smooth Operator

Travis Tavernier *(Infinite Worlds/Atomic Horror)*

Travis Tavernier is a well-known artistic entrepreneur, Hollywood "script doctor," talent scout, critic and pop culture trendsetter. What isn't so well known is that he's a stranded parachronic traveler, a native of Holly (page 526 of the *Basic Set*) who often uses his knowledge of history to help advance the careers of those whose work he admires.

Tavernier was originally a successful art and entertainment buyer for White Star Trading until his parachronic conveyor malfunctioned and appeared in a previously unknown timeline -- somewhere above the Caribbean. Tavernier took the emergency survival kit from the conveyor and escaped as it sank with what few valuables he could carry, then paddled his tiny life-raft to the nearest land, which turned out to be Cuba. There, he traded his jewelry for a stolen passport and caught a boat to the U.S., where he did various jobs, sold his valuables and gambled on a few major sporting events until he'd saved enough to set himself up as an agent, coming to Hollywood in 1951.

By 1953, Tavernier was a huge success, the owner of profitable art galleries and recording studios, and also investing heavily in high tech -- including the work of the TSF, development of submarines and diving gear, and some ideas commonly labeled "weird science," such as time travel and chronoscopy. About this time, he also realized that this wasn't quite the world he knew from Homeline's history books, and not just because of his intervention. Classified documents about UFO crashes in Roswell and Kingman showed that Earth in this timeline was being visited by alien races unknown to White Star. He was unaware, however, that one of his new friends, Constantine Lauren, was actually the leader of the Loi on Earth. Lauren, however, is perhaps the only person on Earth who knows Tavernier's secret, and while the two have similar goals (if slightly different motives) watches him very carefully.

Tavernier's main interest is in getting home -- though as he realizes that this is unlikely with 1950s technology, no matter how many inventors he helps out, he's trying to make his stay as interesting and comfortable as possible. He's also tried promoting modern art that might alert other parachronic travelers who might someday discover his world, including secret messages inserted into songs, films and paintings.

Campaign uses: In an Atomic Horror campaign, the PCs are most likely to meet Tavernier in his role as a backer of the Theoretical Science Foundation. He may also act as a Patron for scientists or artists, or a Contact in the arts world (including film: he has a weakness for science fiction B-movies, and has designed sets and props for several). Tavernier tries not to meddle in politics or break the law, but some of his actions or comments (such as trying to defend the rights of minorities, speaking out against censorship, or trying to tell the U.S. government that the Russians are likely to win the space race) may make the PCs suspicious -- and if they discover his secret, he may become an Enemy or an Ally, depending on their intentions. If the PCs are able to help Tavernier locate and repair his conveyor, this can be used to turn an Atomic Horror game into an Infinite Worlds campaign: a team that resourceful would definitely be of interest to ISWAT!

Tavernier's house is protected by state-of-the-art security, but always contains 2d+3 × $1000 in cash as well as his art collection. Through force of habit, Tavernier tends to carry a lot of money and valuables on him rather than trust to banks; his wallet contains 1d+4 × $100 in cash, and he wears at least $1000 in jewelry.

Other settings: Tavernier may be able to grow rich in any world which values art -- though the more primitive the technology, the less interest he will have in trying to advance it except for his own comfort.

Travis Tavernier   *165 points*

Ht 6'2," Wt 120 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 37 (fake I.D. says 27).

Appearance: Pale complexion, shaggy pale blond hair, (bionic) pale blue eyes; a scrawny but intense-looking young man.

Languages: English (Native); Spanish (Accented), French (Accented), Chinese (Accented), Russian (Accented), Hindi (Accented), Arabic (Accented), Japanese (Accented). [14 points]. TL: 8. Cultural Familiarity: All human cultures.

Attributes: **ST** 9 [-10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 14 [80]; **HT** 11 [10]. [100 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16; HP 9 [0]; Will 14 [0]; Per 16 [10]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]. [10 points]

Advantages and Perks: Acute Vision/1 [2], Charisma/1 [5], Cultural Adaptability [10], Eidetic Memory [5], Fashion Sense [5], High TL/1 [5], Language Talent [10], Microscopic Vision/1 [5], Night Vision/2 [2], No Hangover [1], Precognition advantage (Special Limitations: Cannot See Own Death, -60%; Unreliable, Activation Number 8, -40%) [5], Reputation (+2 to "in crowd," large group, always recognized) [5], Status +1 [0; +1 Status free with Wealth], Talent (Business Acumen)/1 [10], Versatile [5], Voice [10], Wealth (Very Wealthy) [30] [110 points].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Broad-Minded [-1], Careful [-1], Compulsive Carousing (12) [-5], Curious (12) [-5], Mild phobia of oceans [-1], Imaginative [-1], Reputation (-2 to conservatives, large group, always recognized) [5],Responsive [-1], Pacifism (Self-Defense Only) [-15], Post-Combat Shakes [-5], Secret [-20], Skinny [-5], Unique [-5]. [-60 points]

Skills and Techniques: Acting (A) IQ+1 [4]-15; Area Knowledge (LA) (E) IQ [1]-14, (USA) (E) IQ [1]-14; Artist (Painting) (H) IQ [4]-14; Carousing (E) HT+1 [2]-12; Connoisseur (Music) (A) IQ+1 [4]-15, (Visual Arts) IQ [8]-16; Current Affairs/TL6 (Popular Culture) (E) IQ+2 [4]-16, (High Culture) (E) IQ+1 [2]-15, (Science and Technology) (E) IQ+1 [2]-15, Business (E) IQ [1]-14; Detect Lies (H) Per [4]-16; Diplomacy (H) IQ+1 [2]-15†; Driving/TL7 (Car) (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Fast-Talk (A) IQ+2 [2]-16†; Finance (H) IQ+1 [4]-15*; First Aid/TL8 (E) IQ [1]-14; Gambling (A) IQ+2 [2]-16*; History (Arts) (H) IQ [4]-14; Literature (H) IQ [4]-14; Guns/TL8 (Pistol) (E) DX [1]-11; Judo (H) DX-1 [2]-10; Market Analysis (H) IQ+1 [4]-15*; Merchant (A) IQ+2 [8]-17*; Mimicry (Speech) (H) IQ+1 [1]-14†; Motion Picture Camera (A) Photography-1 [2]-14; Musical Composition (H) IQ [4]-14; Photography/TL6 (A) IQ [4]-15; Performance (A) IQ+1 [1]-15†; Propaganda/TL7 (A) IQ+1 [4]-16*; Research/TL7 (A) IQ+1 [2]-14; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ+2 [1]-16†; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-16; Sex Appeal (A) HT+2 [4]-14†; Singing (E) HT+2 [2]-14†; Smuggling (A) IQ [1]-13; Streetwise (A) IQ-1 [1]-13; Swimming (E) DX [1]-11; Writing (A) IQ [1]-13. [91 points]

* +1 for Business Acumen
† +2 for Voice

Gear: Custom-made Leather jacket, jeans, silk shirt and shoes; Datacloth, solar-powered TL8 Complexity 1 computer (resembles handkerchief); Mini-Camera, Digital; Mini-Recorder, Digital; TL7 Sports Car; TL8 Emergency Medkit (usually kept in car).

Verity Van Elven, aka Terry Daniels, aka Silverblade *(Horror/Supers)*

Verity Van Elven is the only surviving child and heir of the Van Elven family, famed as armourers from the Crusades to the Great War. This is not a legacy that Verity finds comfortable, and she has ostensibly chosen to live as a dilettante with pacifist sympathies: she has not closed the company down, but is trying to steer them towards making gadgets and vehicles for the civilian market (some of them of her own design), and has the power to veto any overseas sales.

Privately, however, Verity suspects that wars and many horrific murders are caused by malign supernatural forces, which she is determined to discover, and maybe eliminate. This may be true, or it may be a delusion caused by a

guilty conscience; either way, it has driven Verity to learn whatever skills she may need to spend much of her time hunting for demons and monsters. Because her doctor, an old family retainer has persuaded her that this sort of search is best done in secret, she frequently adopts one of two identities: Terry Daniels, a querulous specialist in the occult and dealer in rare books, and the masked and mysterious Silverblade. While Verity (in her various incarnations) only investigates cases she suspects are supernatural, many of these turn out to be hoaxes -- some of them intended to conceal crimes. This has given Silverblade a reputation as a crimefighter or vigilante, which "he" occasionally exploits.

Campaign uses: Verity is intended as a Patron and/or Ally for characters in a Roaring 20s Horror or Supers campaign. Her house is a museum of weapons and armor (many produced by her family) and hard-to-find books, and to this she's added a large collection of vehicles -- any of which might be lent to monster-hunting PCs. Terry Daniels may assist with their research, and Silverblade might even join them in missions against particularly nasty horrors (or come to their rescue). Verity may also enlist the PCs' aid if she needs more firepower, and can pay for their services. Verity may also act as a Patron for a fellow Gadgeteer wanting to build better vehicles or non-lethal weapons, but lacking the necessary resources.

To turn Verity/Silverblade into a villain, add the Paranoia disadvantage and a Major Delusion that causes her to see evil everywhere (e.g. all epileptics are possessed, all redheads are vampires, all lawyers are members of the Cabal, etc.).

Verity's home and collections are protected with state-of-the-art security, but she throws enough parties that robbing her of some small valuable items will not be especially difficult: the trick will be finding a buyer.

Other settings: Verity may be relocated, with only minor tweaking, to a horror or powers campaign in any world from *Deadlands* to *Cthulhupunk.*

Verity Van Elven, aka Terry Daniels, aka Silverblade   *575 points*

Ht 5'10," Wt 150 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 37.

Appearance: As Verity: tanned complexion, bobbed red-blond hair, green eyes; an attractive, athletic-looking woman. As *Terry:* a stoop-shouldered middle-aged man in heavy horn-rimmed glasses, an unconvincing black toupee, and a walrus mustache. As *Silverblade:* face and hair hidden by a grey coif and mask and black broad-brimmed hat; wears dark grey leather trenchcoat with multiple pockets, black leather gloves, pants and boots.

Languages: English (Native); Spanish (Accented); French (Accented); Arabic (Accented); Russian (Accented); Chinese (Accented); Latin (Accented). [12 points] TL: 6. Cultural Familiarity: Homeline.

Attributes: **ST** 13 [30]; **DX** 14 [80]; **IQ** 15 [100]; **HT** 14 [40]. [250 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d/2d-1; BL 34; HP 15 [10]; Will 15 [0]; Per 17 [10]; FP 14 [0]; Basic Speed 8 [20]; Basic Move 8 [0]. [40 points]

Advantages and Perks: Alternate Identity [5], Ambidexterity [5], Attractive Appearance [5], Combat Reflexes [15], Contact (Business, skill-18, usually reliable, 9-) [6], (Police, skill-15, completely reliable, 9-) [6], (Street, skill-12, somewhat reliable, 9-) [1], Danger Sense [15], Daredevil [15], Eidetic Memory [5], Fearlessness/3 [6], Fit [5], Flexibility [5], Gadgeteer [25], Gizmos [5], Hard to Kill/2 [4], High Pain Threshold [10], Language Talent [10], Less Sleep/3 [6], Night Vision/5 [5], Penetrating Voice [1], Rapid Healing [5], Status +3 (as Verity) [5; 2 levels free with Wealth], Wealth (Multimillionaire/1) [75]. [240 points].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Collects books and vehicles [-1], Curious (9) [-7], Guilt Complex [-5], Imaginative [-1], Loves heights [-1], Minor Addiction (legal stimulants, -1), Minor Delusion (thinks her nightmares may be prophetic) [-5], Nightmares (9) [-7], Obsession (Fighting Evil) [-10], Overconfidence (12) [-5], Responsive [-1], Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10], Secret Identity (Silverblade) [-15]. [-69 points]

Skills and Techniques: Acrobatics (H) DX-1 [2]-13; Acting (A) IQ [2]-15; Area Knowledge (England, Small Nation) (E) IQ+1 [2]-16; Arm Lock (A) Judo +2 [2]-16; Boating/TL6 (Powerboat) (A) DX+1 [4]-15; Climbing (A) DX+3 [2]-17*; Detect Lies (H) Per [4]-17; Diplomacy (H) IQ [2]-16†; Disguise (A) IQ [2]-15; Driving/TL6 (Car) (A) DX+2 [8]-16; Elbow Strike (A) Karate -1 [1]-14; Engineer/TL6 (Aircraft) (H) IQ [4]-15; Escape (H) DX+1 [1]-15*; Fast-Draw (Knife) (E) DX+1 [1]-15‡; Fast-Draw (Pistol) (E) DX+1 [1]-15‡; Fast-Talk (A) IQ+1 [1]-16†; Guns/TL6 (Pistol) (E) DX+1 [2]-15; Intimidation (A) Will [2]-15; Judo (H) DX-1 [2]-13; Karate (H) DX+1 [8]-15; Kicking (H) Karate [3]-15; Knee Strike (A) Karate [2]-15; Lockpicking/TL6 (A) IQ-1 [1]-14; Mechanic (Airplane) (A) IQ [4]-16; Mimicry (Speech) (H) IQ+2 [4]-17†; Motion Picture Camera (A) Photography-1 [2]-14; Occultism (A) IQ+1 [4]-16; Photography/TL6 (A) IQ [2]-15; Piloting/TL6 (Light Airplane) (A) DX+2 [8]-16; Research/TL6 (A) IQ+1 [4]-16; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ+2 [1]-15†; Scaling (H) Climbing -1 [2]-16; Search (A) Per [2]-17; Sex Appeal (A) HT-1 [1]-15†; Shadowing (A) IQ-1 [1]-14; Stealth (A) DX+1 [4]-15; Streetwise (A) IQ-1 [1]-14; Swimming (E) DX [1]-14; Throwing (A) DX [2]-14. [103 points]

* +3 for Flexibility
† +2 for Voice
‡ +1 for Combat Reflexes

Gear (as Silverblade): Short staff, one end sharpened for use as stake, other end capped with silver; Large knife, very fine; Auto Pistol, 9mm TL6, with autofire select (RoF 8); Concussion grenade; Buff coat (DR 2) over cloth armor (DR 1), leather pants (DR 1), leather gloves (DR 2), boots (DR 2), and web gear; broad-brimmed leather hat; silencer; Flashlight, heavy; Lockpicks. *(as Verity and Silverblade)* Roadster, TL6, with concealed compartments, holds Pump Shotgun, 12G TL6, fine quality; Disguise Kit; First Aid Kit; Camera, 35mm; Binoculars; Shovel.

Variant: For an even more formidable version of Verity, assume that her delusion about her nightmares is not a delusion, and expand her Danger Sense into an ESP power.

Adventure Seeds

Blame it on the Stones (Imperial Rome): Marcus Lucius Raptes has just acquired a fabulous blue diamond, and an envious rival, Cassius Komnenos, has dropped hints that the stone is cursed. Cassius offers to pay the PCs handsomely if they can persuade the superstitious Lucius that his luck has run out and that he should dispose of the stone.

Full Fathom Five (Fantasy): 90 years ago, the good ship *Unicorn* disappeared with its load of gold ingots, gems, and holy (and possibly magical) relics. The cash-strapped heroes discover the location of the *Unicorn's* wreck, on the far side of the wilderness, and decide to try to retrieve its treasure. Before they tackle the hill tribes, the weather, the landslides, the sharks, and the undead who haunt the wreck, the PCs will have to acquire magical items that enable them to breathe underwater -- and the best source is Eli Fox.

Storm in a Port (Old West): The PCs are given the job of acting as minders to a troupe of Shakespearean actors touring from New York to San Francisco and back, stopping at some of the wealthier towns along their route. After various misadventures with the performers, they arrive in San Francisco, where they meet Allerton (who is secretly sponsoring the tour). When one of the PCs and one of the beefier actors disappears, Allerton (correctly) suspects that they've been shanghaied, and gives the PCs whatever assistance they need to find them. Friends of Allerton's who can come to their aid include Emperor Norton I, Sam Clemens (Mark Twain), and Tong hatchetmen skilled at martial arts.

Armor Proximi (Horror): The PCs receive a call from an anxious Verity Van Elven late at night. A suit of heavy steel plate has suddenly come to life, and attacked one of her maids with a great axe, then attacked her when she tried to stop it. Van Elven has tried shooting it, exorcising it, and sprinkling it with holy water, but none of these have suppressed the suit. The armor moves slowly enough that she's managed to trap it inside a room, but it's hacking its way through the doors and pursuing her. It's ignored the fleeing male staff, but she doesn't know whether it's intent on killing all women or specifically after her.

She's ordered everyone else out of the house, but is searching through the library for information on the armor or the spell that might have brought it to life. She will be very grateful for any help with her research, or with confining,

disabling or destroying the armor by more direct means.

Hollywood Nights (Atomic Horror): The PCs see Tavernier being mugged on his way to his car, and come to his rescue. In the fracas, one of the PCs is shot and seriously wounded, and Tavernier asks them to grab the first aid kit from his car. After he saves the PC with wonder drugs from a spray hypo, he asks the others to keep his secret. Depending on their next actions, this may lead to him owing the PCs a Favor, even becoming an Ally or Patron -- or a very dangerous Enemy.

Fnordcast Sneak Peek

Sean Punch's Brazilian Adventure

The Secret Masters have always been on the cutting edge of information (whether disseminating it or ruthlessly exterminating it), and we're proving our dedication for keeping you in the know by broadcasting our first Fnordcast straight from our gleaming computer servers.

For our inaugural broadcast, you'll hear Paul Chapman interviewing Sean Punch about his recent trip to Brazil. And you can get it by clicking HERE. (It's about six megs.)

This Fnordcast will be made available to the teeming millions next week, but we're making it available to *Pyramid* subscribers super-early. Listen, and let us know what you think of this grand experiment over on the message boards.

(This Fnordcast is in the MP3 format. If you don't know what an MP3 is, or your computer isn't capable of playing them, then it's quite likely that clicking that link will result in silence or a screen full of seemingly random characters. You have been warned.)

The Courtesan's Guild

for *GURPS*

by Elizabeth McCoy

Even in the far future, the Oldest Profession is unlikely to have gone away. However, it may be *changed* somewhat . . .

The assumption for the Courtesan's Guild is that there are numerous areas of the planet (or numerous planets) which both legalize commercial sexual encounters and require licensing of a professional courtesan. Amateurs may practice the trade, but even if this is legal, they are prohibited from representing themselves as "Professionals," with the training and backing which that implies.

The Courtesan's Guild provides many services, and has simple requirements in return: training, the Courtesan's Oath, and dues. Dues are used for political lobbying, research into medical or cosmetic issues that concern sex-workers, and to maintain the services the Guild provides.

Membership Requirements

Dues are rarely onerous, but there are several levels of membership based on how much a given courtesan is contributing. A basic membership, costing approximately as much as a good dinner at a medium-fancy restaurant, places one on the public lists as a Professional Courtesan who is licensed to practice the trade. For access to the more advanced services, a Professional should expect to pay 10% of the "take," or a few hundred credits per year (whichever is more).

Training is also required, and is provided by the Guild or Guild-approved private classes. The most important skill is Psychology. (In *GURPS,* the minimum level is 13, or 1 point's worth of skill, whichever costs more.) Secondary skills are Professional Skill (Courtesan), Diplomacy, Sex Appeal, and Erotic Art. (Each of these must have whatever costs more points: a minimum skill level of 12, or 1 point's worth of skill.) Classes are also offered in Acrobatics, Artist, Connoisseur, Current Affairs (especially fashion-related), Dancing, Musical Instrument, Philosophy, Singing, and other useful abilities for attracting attention or maintaining intellectual interest. Combat Sport (p. 184 of the *Basic Set*) and very real self-defense skills are also offered. Carousing is not *taught*, but is frequently picked up by students anyway.

The Courtesan's Oath, or Courtesan's Code of Honor (see below), is the expected conduct for a Professional. Failure to comply can get one kicked out of the Guild. Extreme failure to uphold the tenets can cause the Guild to bring legal suit, for defamation of Professionals!

Services

In return for membership, a courtesan can call upon the Guild for certain things. The most basic dues package allows confirmation that one is a *licensed* Professional in good standing, and access to Guild insurance coverage and the Guild Blacklist. Special scheduling programs and web-hosting are also available; many customers are more comfortable with a relatively anonymous web page that shows when a Professional expects to be free for "making a contract" than with calling up and asking the courtesan to pencil in an appointment. It's also more convenient for the courtesan, who may be busy entertaining a client already.

For higher dues, there are other services.

Professional Skill (Courtesan)

This is the skill of being politely available for rent, without being tacky or offending potential clients. It includes the skills of choosing an attractive, sexy outfit; using cosmetics to heighten one's apparent attractiveness in a social situation; and gracious

Background Check

While a Professionals are always close-mouthed about the details of their clients, they can access the Guild's well-protected databanks, and are expected to give certain information back in return, to keep those databanks current and complete.

The Guild provides searches for client names, client preferences (kinky or straight, and so on), and simple recommendations or assessments of personality, such as "not if he's been drinking," "she's a good customer," or "they're looking for a long-term relationship/toy; avoid if you're not interested." In a campaign where there are corporate stations (orbital, deep space, or simply in otherwise "lawless" terrestrial areas), a *location* may have courtesan-pertinent data.

It is possible for someone (or someplace) to be blacklisted with the Guild; typically this involves non-consensual activities, violence, or refusal to pay for services rendered. The Guild Blacklist is available to anyone who pays dues, and tends to leak even to "amateurs" -- if not the reasons behind each blacklisting.

flirting. It also includes the art of listening raptly to whatever one's client wants to talk about, without showing signs of boredom, and understanding the signals people give when they're hoping you'll pick up an interest or a particular fantasy.

(If the GM desires to shift focus, the Guild's required Psychology, Diplomacy, and a certain amount of Connoisseur, Current Affairs, Savoir-Faire, and Sex Appeal could be combined into merely Professional Skill (Courtesan).)

General Information

The Guild also keeps more prosaic listings of useful businesses, such as doctors who practice cosmetic surgery, specialists for certain conditions and procedures, or general medical practices. Architects, clothing stores, and furniture crafters also find their way into the databanks, especially if they involve retired Professionals.

Itinerary Checkups

A Professional's work may involve being put into intimate contact with people who should not be trusted with the same, or lead into hostile areas. A concerned member can file an Itinerary with the Guild. Should he not show up and contact the Guild at the desired time(s), the Guild will file appropriate missing person paperwork with local law enforcement. (The Guild may also send in private investigators, or on-call troubleshooters, depending on how concerned they are about a situation.) Ideally, the local law enforcement will react promptly; a Professional who's filed an Itinerary doesn't sleep in and forget.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Here is a list of useful advantages and disadvantages for the a Professional Courtesan who is a member of the Guild. Note that publicly following the Code of Honor (below) is mandatory for Guild membership!

Lecherousness is conspicuously absent: a Professional is in control of urges, both because availability affects income, and because an unwanted and non-consensual social approach is against the Code of Honor. Lechery would blind someone to whether the contact is desired by both parties.

Advantages

Appearance (5-15 points)

Naturally, having a good Appearance is useful in the Oldest Profession. However, Charisma can often substitute.

Charisma (5+ points)

More Professional Courtesans are likely to be Charismatic than drop-dead gorgeous. Some, however, merely have high levels of Sex Appeal.

Claim to Hospitality (5-10 points)

The exact point cost depends on the number of Guild members and/or Guild Houses. In general, any Guild madam has a free room or two, and only a traveling Professional doesn't have a couch for a fellow Guild member.

Contacts (variable; page 44 of the *Basic Set*)

Professional Courtesans know many people, though usually from a specific social stratum. (Only unusual Professionals count both winos and planetary governors among their clients!) A Professional may have individual Contacts (bought normally), or the GM might permit the varied customers to be a special Contact Group; add +25% to the cost, since their skills could span the gamut of police investigation to surfing. (While individual clients might be more skilled, use the average skill to indicate how much time they're willing to put into answering questions "for free" and during pillow-talk.)

Flexibility (5 points)

Full Double-Jointed [15] is more likely to be a surgical enhancement, but both are useful.

Reputation (5+ points)

A good reputation with the Guild can be researched with a simple query to the Guild databanks, and -- depending on the person in question -- encourage others to be helpful. (This is generally an advantage because a Professional rarely asks a prude to query the Guild databanks.) Sometimes this aid will be in hope of scoring a discount; other times, because of fond memories of some other Professional.

Disadvantages

Naturally, Odious Personal Habits and similar disadvantages are contraindicated to someone who makes a living as a Professional!

Code of Honor (Professional Courtesan) (-5 points)

*A practicing Professional Courtesan **must** have this Code of Honor -- or a Secret that he does **not** actually abide by it!*

The first tenet of the Courtesan's Code of Honor is confidentiality, also known as discretion. Anything the customer says is in confidence, and not to be revealed. One's relationship with a client is also not to be bandied about lightly to anyone outside the guild. One should never use "inside information" to harm a client, and one should respect others' privacy.

Second is politeness, grace, and elegance; a professional courtesan should always be in emotional control, and never casually insulting, clumsy, or unattractive.

Third is that one should always attempt to please the client, leaving him (her, them . . .) with a smile. This also includes consensuality; whether "vanilla" or "chocolate chip and candle wax," a Professional never oversteps the bounds of what the client is willing to do.

Combat Paralysis (-15 points)

This is not a necessary disadvantage; a Professional could be an Olympic-grade sport duelist, or even have Combat Reflexes from living in unsettled areas. However, the Code of Honor *could* send someone into a momentary pause, trying to balance the emergency situation against the ingrained responses of grace, decorum, and civility.

Honesty (-10 points)

A Professional is not someone who engages in illegal transactions in back alleys. Honesty (as a disadvantage) is not required, but it's not uncommon.

Quirk: No Freebies (-1 point)

Despite what some jokingly say, this is not actually part of the Courtesan's Code of Honor. It's merely common.

Reputation (-5 points or more)

Depending on the culture, there may be areas or groups which frown upon trading sex and companionship for money.

Sense of Duty: Clients (-5 points)

Professionals should at least like their customers, and some are so friendly that they will go out of their way to do favors for them. Matchmaking, job-requests, or pointing people at each other to answer questions are all possible actions of a courtesan with this disadvantage. Ideally, these require acting as a go-between until permission to make introductions is given, but matchmaking may necessitate a threesome.

A PC might take a Professional like this *as* a Contact! Use the +25% cost to represent the Courtesan's access to many and varied information sources.

Plot Uses

Professional Courtesans -- and their Guild -- may be mere color, background for a PC or NPC contact, or direct plot elements.

The Guild As Employer

PCs may be retained as investigators by the Guild, checking into rumors of missing amateurs (a warning sign for Professionals), blackmail of Guild functionaries, or of Guild members who violating the Code of Honor. This could be a job for freelancing private investigators, or for an on-staff "Guild spy." (In the latter case, the spy should have suitable cover skills, and other PCs might be the Courtesan's support network and team-mates.)

Full troubleshooters, again, might be either hired freelancers or full-time employees. Possible jobs include rescuing a Professional held hostage by a client, locating a courtesan who filed an Itinerary and hasn't reported in due to mischance or foul play, and breaking an unreasonably-arrested Guild member out of an overly prudish area's jail.

The Guild As Opponent

Aside from the possibilities of the Guild as an Enemy to fanatical Puritans or a group of villainous PCs, the Guild might have other reasons to be a genteel, decorous antagonist.

Rival Guilds: Like any sort of organization, the management can become obsessed with making sure that only *their* "union" members get the jobs. If the group happens to have a friend (or PC) on one side of the argument, the other side could mark them as people to interfere with. This could be as crude as a would-be über-pimp sending thugs to mess up Professionals, or as ambiguous as being offered money for "dirt" on the other side's management.

Alternatively, the PCs might be the agents of one Guild, trying to move into a rival union's territory! Are they bringing in better services or not?

Framed: Someone who mysteriously appears on the Guild's Blacklist may suffer many petty snubs, or even have Professionals urging their clients to avoid doing business with the unlucky target. Less-ethical courtesans may even request their customers to break someone's nose, or break up their relationships. The question, of course, is *why* this mistake happened . . .

Morality Police: Player characters on the side of Law And Decency may have to deal with the political and popular influence of the Guild moving into their area, striving to make their form of prostitution legal. Can they direct the silken ladies (and gentlemen) elsewhere? Perhaps one could throw himself on the grenade of a Madam and convince her to espouse monogamy instead?

The Guild As Information and Plot Device

For whatever reason, possibly including "you were the first people in the area," a Guild member contacts the PCs to deliver a message about someone, something, or somewhere. This could be the poisoned Professional who presses a data-disc into someone's hand and gasps, "Get this to the Guild," or a comm-call of "You're the closest ship, and we've heard war's erupted on that planet. Can we hire you to get our Guild House staff out?"

And, of course, a Professional can be a Contact (see above) -- and one who might come to a character when fearing that a client is mind-controlled/spying for the enemy empire/a serial killer/something else disturbing enough to break confidentiality.

Pyramid Review

The Deryni Adventure Game

Published by [Grey Ghost Press, Inc.](#)

Written by Aaron Rosenberg, Ann Dupuis, Melissa Houle, Jennifer Brinn, Sharon Cohen, James A. Davis, Steve Kenson, Melinda Sherbring, & Doyce Testerman

Edited by Nancy Berman, Ann Dupuis, Melissa Houle, & Katherine Kurtz

Art, graphics by James A. Davis, Ann Dupuis, Michael Herring, Daniel M. Davis, & Martine Lynch

256-page b&w hardcover; $39.99

Low fantasy isn't a subject that gets a lot of treatment in RPGs these days. If it doesn't sport ancient dragons, magic that can level a castle, and gods enough to fill an amphitheatre, your swords-and-slight-sorcery book is probably going to be stuck on a deep circle of niche-product hell. But what if you license yourself into a built-in audience? It might work for *The Deryni Adventure Game.*

Using the *[FUDGE](#)* system, Grey Ghost Press brings Katherine Kurtz's world to the tabletop. In her Deryni stories, we see an off-kilter version of our own medieval past (the part running between the 9th and 12th centuries, anyway). The Eleven Kingdoms are centered on pseudo-Europe, but the action in the series also drifts to the Middle East and such now and then. There are court intrigues, military actions, and romantic encounters, but the catalyst for many of these tales is the Deryni -- a race of humans who possess the gift of magic.

The standard witch-hunt is therefore a deadly reality. The Church rails against them, the Crown has a potential scapegoat for its problems, and the people's fears of falling prey to dark arts may not be simple superstition. Rather than use it as a tiresome and unyielding plot device, though, Deryni status changes from age to age. Sometimes they're the conquering heroes; other times they're made out to be demons; and still others they're merely the stuff of legend. This translates to some fairly rich opportunities for campaign growth in the adventure game (though you might have to play a few generations to cover all the social implications).

Magic is really just the jumping-off point. Although historically based, the Deryni world is a bit more cinematic: If you engage in combat a lot, you'll probably die, but you may expire from fancier tech than the period really ought to offer. Not everything is about hexes. There's the Camberian Council, working to protect the magical veil of secrecy; a Church that's as much a political football as a bane for witchcraft; and royal bloodlines whose powers might unwittingly be a match for the Deryni.

It refers to itself as high fantasy, but everything is played pretty low-key here. You have at least as many options for playing a normal human as you do playing the magic users. In fact, being really good at any one form of spell casting takes intense development many can ill afford, and the game graciously doesn't assume everyone wants to wear the pointy hat. There are two main character creation systems offered: subjective and Five Point FUDGE.

The first creates your character in descriptive terms, so you and the GM can turn your mental image into your in-game

persona without overpowering the story. The point system lets you "buy" the character, then customize it by "trading" (raising and lowering) various traits; if you want to be better at riding a horse and seducing men, you could lower combat and area knowledge skills. You can buy packages with associated abilities, like the noble rank that elevates you culturally and gives you the skills required by your station in life. Alternately you can cherry-pick everything, but packages focus on the necessities of particular life-paths.

If you go the Deryni route, you receive a Power attribute and a lousy level of skill in the available magic powers. Sacrifice, and you might get one of these at a decent level. Mind-reading, shields, and the fabled healing, among others, are all traits under the general magic heading. Beneath those are series of possible effects -- for example, the casting ability lets you "cast" your senses about remotely (clairvoyance), or look inside a lock to better pick it. More specific effects are dictated by dramatic necessity, so the GM and players work for the most satisfying story they can tell. Sure, you can push the limits, but spells aren't easy and will suck the fatigue -- or the life -- out of your character if you aren't careful.

Even from a material standpoint, the book plays to type. The pages are so heavy they're almost parchment. The cover is thick and lavishly illustrated and, in keeping with *FUDGE* practice, the interior illustrations are mostly clipart or historical woodcuts. These may be a cheap way to keep the cost down, but they're used to wonderful effect and match the accompanying text precisely. Other RPGs should have such good graphics for the money they sink into them.

Untangling how well the game captures the Deryni world is tricky. Once you've been told the basis of the novels -- magic as a racial ability -- there's not much to say without getting into the meat of each novel (or trilogy), and those aren't so easily digested. Plot thumbnails are spread over the timeline and travelogue, and while the character and location appendices are good references, they require more context to make full sense of them. Those same pages could have expanded the gazetteer. There's plenty of advice, both for generic GMing and adding Deryni-specific plots, but other games have trodden the medieval how-to before this. Several bits of potpourri round it out, with calendars, Church terminology, excerpts from Lisa J Steele's book *Fief,* and some straightforward *d20 System* conversion guidance. Oh, and the goat adventure isn't to be missed.

If you're unfamiliar with the *FUDGE* line, don't worry. While not as thorough as the core book, the system has always defined itself by its playability sans an imagined need for a comprehensive rules set (and even so there are at least two ways of doing everything here, from combat to commerce). Just as magic is an underlying factor in the stories, a bridge to telling deeper tales of human passion, so, too, do *FUDGE* mechanics stand by quietly until you need them. In *The Deryni Adventure Game,* the two form a fine symbiosis.

--Andy Vetromile

Stories of Formed Stones

Using Fossils in *Ars Magica*

by Sheila Thomas
Illustrations by Angela Taylor

This article is designed for *Ars Magica 4th Edition.* While the basic ideas are compatible with *5th Edition,* not all the books referenced have *5th Edition* counterparts as yet.

Snakes Eggs

Introduction

Fossils turned up as often in the past as they do now, and people made guesses about their origin and nature. Folklore built up about many of the fossilised shells, bones and other residue of creatures long gone; in Mythic Europe, much, if not all, of this lore is true. The stories presented here encapsulate some of these beliefs and may provide ideas for incidents in a saga or for any game with a related background.

Storyguides may find it convenient to divide the items described here into two types when considering the applicable Arts. Items that are shaped stones alone are best treated as Terram, while those that are bones -- to the eye -- would be Animal or Corpus.

There is scope for complication when using the myths, however, by adding requisites, which are suggested below. The important thing is that the stories are true, so no amount of Intellego will elicit information about what we now know to be the origins of the "formed stone" or fossil bone. No magic can turn a gryphon bone into a dinosaur, though it might turn an ammonite into a snake.

For the convenience of keeping the stories close to the illustrations of the type of fossil they are about, the notes are grouped by modern-day fossil family and, where possible, the modern name of the animal is given in parentheses for completeness. Note that one type of fossil can have several different beliefs associated with it.

Myths

Bivalves

The Devil's Toenail *(Gryphaea arcuata)*
Affected by Vim; infernal

This

afternoon, I happened to pass by one of those boys who habitually loiter about in the courtyard before meal times. He was peering intently at something he turned over and over in his hands so I looked at what had captured his attention so. Imagine my horror when I saw that what he had was one of the toe nail clippings of the devil himself! Here it is. Look at the growth lines that form ridges all along the vicious curving claw. How huge and horrible must be the claw from which this tip was trimmed!

--Fr. Edward of Winchester

Clach crubain *(Gryphaea arcuata)*
Affected by Terram and Corpus

So, you have pains in the bones! What else do you expect at your age? It comes to us all, you know. I could tell you about the way my old joints ache in the long, damp, dark nights when the fire has gone cold. I will show you how I ease the stiffness. See this strange-shaped stone here? You'll not find any like it around the edge of the loch; it came from a place a long way to the south. See how it is bent over, like a body half-crippled with the pains we suffer? I crush a little of it and mix the powder with honey, then spread it on scraps of cloth and bind them around the inflamed joints. Try it!

--Niall of the Covenant of Mac Gruagach

In Play: See **Hedge Magic,** p.35 and **Ars Magica 4th Edition,** p.49. The ointment described counts as a minor potion and adds +1 to a Chirurgy or Medicine roll made at the time the ointment is applied. Any character treated with the ointment can add +1 to the effects of the Arthritis Flaw for 12 hours following application (i.e. the penalty for having the Flaw is reduced to -2 or -5 for that period).

Crinoids

St Cuthbert's Beads
Affected by Terram; divine

Look over there! Yes, it is Sister Winifred on her knees as usual. See that string of beads in her hands? She uses them to count the number of times she repeats each prayer. Those beads make Sister Winifred's prayers very powerful, you know, for though they look like little stones, the beads on her string were made by St.Cuthbert himself! Not that she met him personally, of course. No, she gathered those beads from along the seashore when she was just a little girl.

--Sister Hildelith of Durham

Sister Winifred

In Play: See **Pax Dei,** pp.46-47. Anyone, not just a member of the ordained clergy, praying sincerely while using St. Cuthbert's Beads may have their prayer granted according to the rules for Blessings.

Star stones or Asteriae *(Pentacrinites)*
Affected by Terram, or beyond the limits of Hermetic magic

This is my special stone and no-one is going to take it from me. I'll let you look at it if you promise not to touch it. It is cold and dull now but once it shone high above us with a great light. Yes, it is a fallen star! I did not see it fall myself, but you can see from the shape that that is what it is.

--Gall, son of Seppi the woodcutter

In Play: See **The Fallen Angel,** pp.63-64, for ideas on using fallen stars in a saga.

Fish teeth

Toad Stones, Bufonites *(Lepidotes)*
Affected by Terram and Animal

Come back tomorrow, girl, and then you shall have your charm. These things cannot be rushed however much you wish for haste. See here. These are the eyes of toads that have been turned to stone. No, just the eyes, not

the whole toad! I have to leave these soaking overnight in a stone vessel full of . . . . but no! Be off with you and come back the same time tomorrow. And be sure you bring with you that bacon you promised me!

--Mieke the Cunning Woman

In Play: See **Hedge Magic,** pp.36-39, 58-60 and see **The Medieval Bestiary, Revised Edition,** p. 77 (use statistics for the frog). A Toad of Virtue is like any other toad except that it has a Toad Stone in its forehead. A Toad Stone is a Stone of Virtue and contains wild vis. Uncommon. Wild Vis 1. Standard Vis 0.
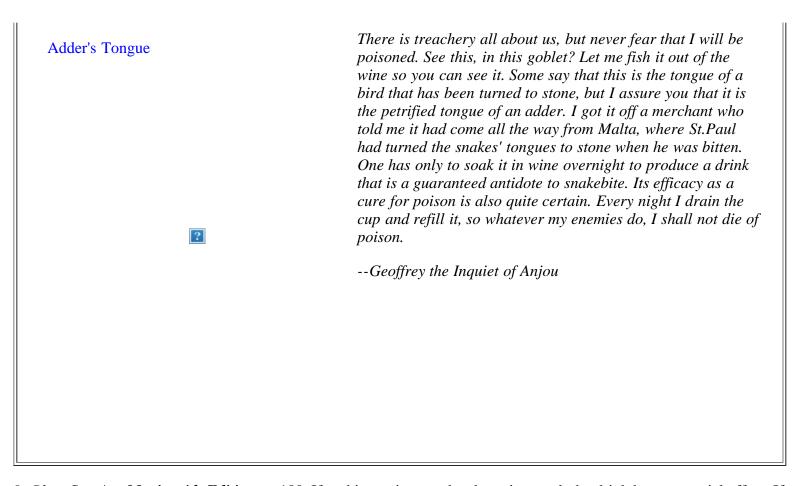
Glossopetrae (shark teeth)
Affected by Terram or beyond the limits of Hermetic magic

Glossopetrae

Shark's Teeth

I will consider your question and give you answer on the morrow, for tonight I must observe the moon to learn the answer. This is teaching that has come down to us from the great days of Rome's supremacy, that arrow-shaped stones like this fall from the sky during eclipses of the moon. Thus it will help me to learn the information you desire.

Incidentally, it has been reported that stones like this can be used to make the wind die down, but Pliny did not believe this and nor do I.

--Giovanni, Selenomancer

In Play: See **The Mysteries,** pp.108-109. Selenomancy is a form of Ceremonial Augury. Observation of the face of the moon normally gives bonuses for Mentem +2, Mental illness +4, Conception +3. Observation while holding a glossopetrae stone gains an additional +1.

Adder's Tongue
Affected by Terram and Animal

Adder's Tongue

There is treachery all about us, but never fear that I will be poisoned. See this, in this goblet? Let me fish it out of the wine so you can see it. Some say that this is the tongue of a bird that has been turned to stone, but I assure you that it is the petrified tongue of an adder. I got it off a merchant who told me it had come all the way from Malta, where St.Paul had turned the snakes' tongues to stone when he was bitten. One has only to soak it in wine overnight to produce a drink that is a guaranteed antidote to snakebite. Its efficacy as a cure for poison is also quite certain. Every night I drain the cup and refill it, so whatever my enemies do, I shall not die of poison.

--Geoffrey the Inquiet of Anjou

In Play: See ***Ars Magica 4th Edition,*** p. 180. If nothing poisonous has been ingested, the drink has no special effect. If there is poison, the drinker gains +2 to their Stamina roll.

Trilobites

Petrified butterflies (tail of certain Ordovician trilobites)
Affected by Terram and Animal

Look at this poor butterfly! Hold it tightly. You won't hurt it, because the poor thing has been turned into stone. It was done long ago, by Merlin, Great King Arthur's wizard. I don't know why he did such a cruel thing!

--Medi o Caerfyrddin

Petrified Butterfly

Ammonites

Snakestones (*Dactylioceras commune* and others)
Affected by Terram and Animal

Snakestone

Good sir, you look like a man who would appreciate an oddity from across the seas. Here I have something come all the way from the northeast of England! I see you know it at once for a petrified snake, all coiled tightly with the tail in the centre. Of course, that is just what it is, but did you know that this snake was turned to stone by St. Hilda of Whitby? She had chosen the site on the cliff top for her new nunnery, you see, but the snakes were reluctant to vacate the premises. The head? Well, St. Cuthbert cursed the creatures for paying so little heed to St. Hilda's wishes and so they lost their heads. Take this home from the fair and amaze your friends!

--Francesco at the Troyes fair

St. Hilda

The Horn of Ammon, "Cornu Ammonis"
Affected by Terram

Turn over that little round grey stone on the table there. Yes, it is no wonder you are surprised! It looks just like a tiny golden ram's horn, does it not? But those bright crystals are not true gold. They are what the alchemists call fool's gold, but very beautiful, none the less, and it is useful too. According to Pliny, it can bring about prophetic visions in dreams. I put it under my pillow on the night before I intend to commence a new project or make a journey. As to where it came from, Aristotle tells us that minerals are formed by vaporous exhalations of the earth, some tending to be dry, smoky and others moist. It may be that this pretty thing formed in this way.

--Fidens, Bonisagi, filius Auditor Iovis

In Play: The Horn of Ammon is useful to an Oneiromancer with the Virtue Dream Interpreter (see ***Kabbalah,*** p. 116) in Dream Augury, as detailed in ***The Mysteries,*** p. 96, where it confers an additional +1 if placed under the dreamer's pillow with the necessary arcane connection to learn something about an object or person. If used by an Oneiromancer with the Dream Interpreter Virtue on the night before commencing a significant project or setting out on a major journey, no arcane connection is needed to induce an auguring dream about the project or journey.

Brachiopods

Spiriti Sanctus *(Rhynchonella)*
Affected by Terram; divine

> *I always wear this on a cord about my neck. It is an amulet to the Holy Ghost. Look closely and you will see that this stone is shaped like a dove with outstretched wings. It is my protection from the devil's wiles. I clutch it and pray when temptation comes my way.*
>
> *--Sr. Konstanze of Tübingen in Schwabia*

In Play: See ***The Maleficium,*** p.53 and ***Festival of the Damned Anniversary Edition,*** pp.66-85. Anyone touching the Spiriti Sanctus and praying will resist that specific temptation until the next sunset.

Belemnites

Thunderbolts
Affected by Terram and Auram

> *Stones like this are flung down as darts from heaven during a thunderstorm. As they fall, you see the flash and when they hit the ground, you hear the thunder. I found this one just after the huge storm that brought down the far side of the castle wall six years ago. It has several uses. It can prevent nightmares, so I keep it by me when I sleep. It can protect you from being carried off by demons from the sky. See here, where the edge is damaged? I break away just a little of it at times because powder from it can be used to make a charm to ward off lightning or, if blown into the eyes, the powder can cure soreness. Let us pray that there are not so many eyes to treat or storms to ward away that I use it all up and the demons come for me!*
>
> *--Brother Matthias of Wallingford*

Thunderbolt

In Play: See ***The Mysteries,*** p.103. Sleeping with a Thunderbolt has some of the effect of the spell Blissful Dreams (MuMe 20), keeping nightmares away but not affecting pleasant or neutral dreams. The target gets no bonus to rolls the following day.

See ***The Maleficium,*** p.65. Minor/lesser demons keep away from anyone with a Thunderbolt on their person or within Touch range.

See *Hedge Magic,* pp.34-35. The powder works as a Minor Potion giving +2 to a medicine roll to cure sore eyes.

See *Ars Magica 4th Edition,* p.77, pp.120-121 and Hedge Magic, pp.42-43. A Hermetic or Natural magician may use powder from a Thunderbolt to give a +3 spell focus bonus for Perdo Auram spells affecting lightning.

Oyster Shells
Affected by Animal

> *I found this shell while taking one of the less-frequented passes, little more than a goat track. The path is only usable in summer since the snows come early up there, and linger through spring. I'll show it to you next time we're that way. Now, examine this shell. It looks just like the shells of those oysters we ate fresh from the sea last year, doesn't it? But this came from inside the rocks near the peak of a mountain. It is certain evidence that the great Flood, sent by God as a punishment for man's wickedness, did indeed cover all the land. Let it be a warning to us all to shun sin.*
>
> *--Wilhelm "Celeripes," House Mercere, to his apprentice, Eva*

Bones from extinct large vertebrates e.g. mammoth, mastodon

Giants
Affected by Corpus

> *Of course there are giants! Don't you believe the story of Goliath in the Bible? St.Augustine has seen their remains, and he undoubtedly speaks the truth. I'll find the right book in a minute . . . . look here. He writes of the large bones revealed by the ravages of time, the violence of streams and other events which are tangible proof that men and creatures were once much larger than they are now, and tells how he himself found a tooth of a giant on the shore of Utica. There are numerous reports in the old writings of enormous bones and teeth being found. See here, Pausanias reports the bones of giants from places in the Empire of the Nicaea. You must work hard on your Latin and Greek so you too can read these and learn.*
>
> *Cyprian, librarian of Constantinople in the Theban Tribunal*

Heroes
Affected by Corpus

> *It was a fact well-known to the ancients that the great heroes of the past were superior to us in many ways. How did Samson bring the building crashing down about his captors if his strength did not exceed our own many times? There is clear evidence for their greater stature. St.Clement of Alexandria particularly warns against the pagan practice of honoring the shoulder blade of the hero Pelops, whose bone of polished ivory is ten times the size of a normal man's. Philostratus reports the words of a Phoenician merchant who spoke with a grower of grapes in Elaeus, at the mouth of the Hellespont, who had himself set eyes on the bones of great Achilles in a cave at Sigeum.*

Cyclops (skull of dwarf elephant of the Pleistocene era)

Affected by Corpus

Come into my Sanctum, if you dare, and I shall show you a wondrous thing, the skull of a monster out of legend! You may know that in my younger days I explored far, seeking relics of our Roman heritage. One stormy October night I was on a ship bound from Palermo to Salerno. My magic held off the worst for a while but I tired and the seas overwhelmed our vessel. I came ashore alone on a small beach and took shelter in a cave where I found a heap of bones. The limb bones were immense so that at first I thought this had been the abode of a giant but when I found the skull . . . .! There, right in the centre of the forehead was a great hole, just the place and size and shape for the eye of a cyclops!

Cyclops

Lorenzo of Jerbiton, a Seeker, at Literatus in the Roman Tribunal

Echinoids

Fairy loaves (Micraster and Echinocorys)
Affected by Terram

Fairy Loaf

Ma says I have to put this back where I found it, under an old cracked bowl in a dark corner behind the cooking pots. She says it is a loaf of fairy bread and that if we keep in it the house, the family will never go short of bread. If that's true, how come she won't give my brothers and me an extra slice when we ask? Ma says that some people say that a stone like this should be keep on the shelf in the dairy to keep the milk from going sour, but we don't keep a cow. I suppose if I put it back, it can keep our jug of milk fresh as well as keep us in bread.

--Mari, daughter of Simon with the red beard from Pond Cottage

In Play: A Fairy loaf in the dairy will keep milk there fresh for one day longer than is usual. It does not generate extra bread, however.

Lapidus Judaici, Jew-stones (spine of Balanocidaris glandaria)
Affected by Terram

> *What are you staring at? No, this isn't something I am going to eat. Look here, this is what I'm licking, this little white stone shaped like a club or an acorn, with ridges running down it lined with tiny bumps. I get these pains here in my back, see? And how it can hurt when I make water! This helps, this little white stone. I got it long ago and far away, when I went to the Holy Land with the crusaders as a washerwoman. That's a story and a half!*
>
> *--Odile the blessed*

In Play: Licking or sucking the stone for around 15 minutes alleviates symptoms of kidney and urinary tract disease for a day.

Dinosaur bones

Griffin or gryphon *(Protoceratops)*
Affected by Animal

> *Whilst I was in Venice recently, I made the acquaintance of a certain merchant who has contacts who trade east along the silk route. He was a cultivated, generous man who employed a skilled and inventive cook so taking dinner with him was a pleasure in several regards. During my second visit to his home he told me of the great beasts, half lion, half eagle, that menace the trade caravans as they pass through the desert regions of Persia. I thought he was perhaps making an excuse to over-charge me for the silks I was proposing to buy from him, but research proved his tale to be correct. The existence of these creatures is confirmed in the words of the poet Aristeas, as quoted by Herodotus, Philostratus and others.*
>
> *Walter of Vézelay, House Jerbiton*

Gryphon

In Play: See **The Medieval Bestiary,** p.55

Late Medieval Ideas on the Origins of Fossils

> *Behold this stone, very like a large beetle, the body divided into three sections, with ridges running across it. It is as finely detailed as if a living creature had been turned to stone. Or maybe you think that some craftsman*

has carved it? No, this grew in the earth just as you see it now.

Some call such shaped stones lusus naturae, sports of nature, formed by a creative force, vis plastica, in the soil. Some alchemists labor to control this force in the hope that it will lead them to the aura vitalis. Others say that shaped stones are the result of certain astral conjunctions which fertilize the nature of the soil and rocks with vis formativa. There are those who teach that they arise through the individualisation of objects by a condensation of vapors liberated by fermentation in deeper-lying rocks. Some claim formed stones are anomalies in causality, others that they are reflections of ancient failures and omissions in creation, but how can any believe that God errs? Are these put into the ground by devils, to tempt us to believe that God makes mistakes? Perhaps they are the sterile creations of Satan, who, mocking life, may form the likeness of a living thing but can never give it breath.

--Fr. Pedro de Alvarez y Toledo

Lab

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Pyramid Review

Interstellar Players (for Classic BattleTech)

Published by [FanPro LLC](#)

Written by Herbert A. Beas II, Randal N. Bills, Warner Doles, Chris Hartford, Ken Horner, Nick "Gunslinger" Marsala, David L. McCulloch, Paul Sjardjin, Peter Smith, Christoffer "Bones" Trossen, & Andreas Zuber

Cover by Kevin McCann

Illustrated by Dave Allsop & Klaus Scherwinski

144-page b&w softcover; $24.99

Whichever version you play -- board game, miniatures wargame, [Collectible Miniatures Game](#), [RPG](#), or computer game -- **BattleTech** is fundamentally a game about big robots, big guns, and big lasers, and then even bigger robots, even bigger guns, and even bigger lasers, all aimed at other robots with the intention of blasting them into scrap. Okay; so technically battlemechs are not robots and have pilots, but the point is that **Classic BattleTech** places a certain emphasis on the engagements fought between the game's varied and many factions using its "lords of the battlefield." A minor focus is placed upon the numerous factions, major and minor, and these two emphases runs throughout the majority of the supplements for the game.

All of this marks FanPro's latest release as being quite a different beast, because both emphases are, if not wholly absent, present in a much reduced capacity. Written with both **Classic BattleTech** and [**Classic BattleTech: the Roleplaying Game**](#) in mind, **Interstellar Players** is not a book about the wheelers and dealers of the **BattleTech** milieu as the title suggests. Rather, **Interstellar Players** explores the murky place of the conspiracy in 3067, along with a mystery or two. On display here are 10 major organizations wielding both influence and power from behind veils of smoke and mirrors, plus five minor groups, all which can add the frisson of secrecy and the unknown to either a **Classic BattleTech** or **Classic BattleTech: the Roleplaying Game** campaign.

The format for each entry is simple. After an introduction from the collection's pseudonymous editor, one or two documents relating to the conspiratorial group follow, and then is ended by a short GM's section describing how the group might be used. The documents vary in format, and include journalists' articles, letters, diaries, surveillance data, and transcripts from audio and visual recordings both overt and covert. Although feeling like a **Shadowrun** supplement, and although the subject matters are not dissimilar, **Interstellar Players** lacks the conjecture, discussion, and opinion present in **ShadownRun** supplements. This has the downside of making this book somewhat dry in places.

Physically, the supplement is up to FanPro's usual standards, though the lack of an index is an irritant. The use of other fonts to simulate handwriting is fitting, but it is not always an easy read. The artwork is good though, with Dave Allsop's heavy style adding an unnerving -- but also fitting -- feel to the book.

Unfortunately, with a millennia of history, mysteries, and secrets to draw from, **Interstellar Players** gets off to a surprisingly dull start. This takes the conspiratorial staple of the Illuminati and maps it onto the history of the Inner Sphere, having its head marry into the family at the head of the Star League. Thus a de Rothschild becomes a

Cameron, and the Illuminati spread its tentacles even further beyond Terra. Of course, as is the nature of such theories, the last Star Lord was secreted away before the assassination attempt on his life that felled the Star League, allowing the conspiracy to continue. Also offered is an alternate explanation for the Clans and what the Illuminati are currently up to, but it never escapes the feeling of hokum. If this is the point of the piece, works well enough. If not, it feels overwrought and too broad to be of immediate use in a game.

Fortunately, the anthology gets better and is more applicable, beginning with the "Irian Corporate Cabal." Headquartered within the Free Worlds League, the reach of Irian Technologies reach extends almost into Clan space and is bolstered by multiple corporate alliances with businesses throughout the Inner Sphere. It appears to be all business, and that could be its only motive, but could that extend to manipulating events to keep the profits from war flowing?

Part professional, part amateur, part funded by donation, mostly for profit, Interstellar Expeditions is an archaeological organization devoted to uncovering the secrets of mankind's history. Selling most of its finds, it also needs protection from a 'mech unit known as the "Green Ghosts," similarly after the same secrets. In addition to discovering several "lost" colonies deep in the Periphery, the most notable secret is the trail of the Minnesota Tribe -- who might be the abhorred Clan Wolverine -- round the edge of the Inner Sphere. If so, this could land Interstellar Expeditions in deep trouble with the Clans seeking vengeance on Clan Wolverine's descendants.

At a minimum, the Genecaste -- the book's only real Clan secret -- are a B-movie horror tale to throw at the players. Clan offcastes, they have found homes in the most inhospitable of niche habitats, but undergo extreme gene tailoring to survive there. Hunted to extinction by the more normal Clans, their only aim is survival, and will go to extreme measures to ensure it. Really, though, they are there to add an element of the weird and the alien to the otherwise fairly straight setting. Also weird are the Exituri, an anti-technology religious sect from within the Free Worlds League, whose harsh home world and lifestyle severely limits life expectancy. This leads to a high number of orphans ready for adoption into accepting homes across the Inner Sphere. Could the cult be exporting children?

Of particular interest to long-time **BattleTech** fans will be the section on the Bounty Hunter, the notorious 'mechwarrior who first appeared 150 years prior in the 2920s. Most noted for the feud begun with Natasha Kerensky, the infamous Black Widow of Wolf's Dragoons, after stealing her battlemech, the Bounty Hunter was last seen in 3051. His reappearance in 3064 raises more questions, suggesting at a dynasty rather the one man. The book's Rules Addendum details all of the Bounty Hunter's equipment, including the Body Armor, and all four of the 'mechs (with record sheets) he is known to have piloted.

Also detailed is the Sixth of June, an extreme faction within Word of Blake dedicated to the fall of the Successor Houses; and the One Star Faith, obsessed with the fate of Nicholas Kerensky, who has survived the faith-shattering coming of the Clans to find a home in Clan space! Almost balancing each other are the Brotherhood of Cincinnatus and the Davion Warriors' Cabal. The first is a patriotic veterans association within the Lyran Commonwealth, whose terror tactics have driven it almost underground, while the latter seeks to restore the Davion family to greatness, or, if impossible, to elevate the Federated Suns to greatness, rising its nobility with it.

The minor groups discussed include the Far Lookers, a fringe group whose dedication to continued colonization deep into the Periphery has split the Taurian Concordat; and the Coterie, a disaster relief charity turned cult whose donations seem not always to go the needy. The Scourge of Death is a terrorist organization that has haunted the Free Worlds League for centuries, whose original ringleaders might have escaped into the Periphery in what is a knowing nod to Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. The JàrnFòlk, descendents from Raselhague, are a faux-Scandinavian people whose high-quality decorated pistols are in much demand, as are their highly trained outcaste assassins. The final article begins to look at lost planets before being censored.

As is the norm for FanPro supplements, **Interstellar Players** is rounded out with rules particular to the book's background. Primarily for the **Classic BattleTech: the Roleplaying Game,** the new additions include Influence as a trait, Special (or secret) Contact and Enemy, the Systema martial arts (employed by the JàrnFòlk), remote and self activation implants (for toxins and explosives), and environmental survival implants such as eye covers, filtration livers, and gills. Extra rules cover brainwashing and the creation of Genecaste NPCs.

With a book like this, it raises almost as many questions as it answers, often leaving it up to the GM to fully resolve some. Plus there are some secrets that you would almost never expect to be fully revealed, such as the identity and fate of the Minnesota Tribe, so the welcome hints given here also intrigue and infuriate. Both these hints and the book as a whole work and read better when focusing on smaller groups or ones with a narrow remit like Interstellar Expeditions, being more tailored to the **BattleTech** universe. The suggestions for using each group also work better the smaller the group. The contents of **Interstellar Players** is of more immediate use with the RPG, but this does not mean that it cannot be used with the wargame, the book's larger groups providing the scope for this. With still work for the GM to develop, **Interstellar Players** is nevertheless a fascinating look at some of the **BattleTech** universe's secrets.

--Matthew Pook

Dork Tower!

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Making Stuff Up For Fun & Profit

I was reading a review from [RPG.net](#) about the *World of Synnibarr RPG.* Now, I won't speak about the review otherwise except to note that it described an interesting aspect of this game. Apparently, the GM is expected to take detailed notes on *everything,* and if the GM deviates from those notes, then the players get extra experience points. (My own efforts to glean this information from my copy of this game have been unsuccessful, as a freak earthquake cracked the six-inch Plexiglass chamber I use to access questionable books, and I'm not sure if the robotic waldo would provide sufficient protection.)

Now, obviously I would have a hard time reconciling this rule with my style of GMing as I tend to deviate slightly from my notes. I use "deviate slightly" in the sense that you might apply to someone who deviates slightly from the Ten Commandments by lying about building a statue to Ba'al on the Sabbath against his parents' and wife's wishes in order to woo a neighbor and check out her fine ass.

And by "ass" I mean "oxen."

Which is to say that I don't exactly follow my notes, so much as make stuff up based on the "Croatoan"-esque scribblings found on the paper napkins I unearth from my pockets mere minutes before game starts. What could be the lead villain's name could just as easily be a ketchup stain.

Nevertheless, I do believe there is a contract that the GM enters into with the players: If you're going to make stuff up, make sure you do it in a way that doesn't tick people off.

I [spoke before](#) about how I was one of the nine people in America to watch the FOX show *Reunion.* For those who didn't hear about the show and don't remember my previous column, the conceit of the series was that each episode centered around a group of five friends and took place in both the present and (via flashback) the past, with each episode encompassing one year of their 20-year history. The modern-day framing element was a murder investigation of one of the five, with a fairly strong implication that the murderer was one of the other five. As such, the entire series was sold as a "whodunit"-meets-*Melrose Place.*

However, the show's creators have more or less admitted that the didn't have much of an idea for how the show was going to end; they had a general idea of who did it, but hadn't pegged down the specifics. Worse, the series was first short-ordered (downgraded from 20 to 13 episodes), and then cancelled after only nine of the 13 had been shown. Really, viewers got the equivalent of the first half of a mystery book, with a Post-It note on the last page saying, "If you're still reading, I think the butler did it. Maybe."

Pretend that this paragraph is a brilliant and non-jarring transition.

Way back in 1991, DC Comics had a storyline called *Armageddon 2001,* which, as the name implied, took place in the far-flung future of the year 2001. The general plot of this storyline was that one of the Earth's heroes had turned into a villain and enslaved the planet. Through plot-foolery, a time-traveler named Waverider went back to 1991 and began investigating the "modern-day" (1991) heroes, trying to sort out which one would eventually go bug-nuts.

This series, too, was built around a mystery, with the readers invited to figure out which hero would turn out to be evil. The only problem is, it wasn't much of a mystery; whether because of press leak or the obviousness of the clues planted in the first issue, pretty much *everyone* knew by week 1.5 what the big "shocking" revelation was going to be in week 12. The Powers That Be at DC decided that this wasn't a good way to keep the kiddies buying their funny books, so they changed the ending so that it was a new, different shocking revelation. The only problem was, the person they chose for their alternative ("In the event that the traitorous hero is unable to fulfill his duties as master villain, the title goes to the first runner-up master villain . . .") was unable to be the master villain since, in the flash-forward sequence, you see that hero fighting against the villain. (For more information on *Armageddon 2001,*, check out the [Wikipedia](#) reference.)

Finally, for those who remember the hype the first time around, I don't need to remind you about the hoopla surrounding *Twin Peaks,* another series built around a "Whodunit?" central premise. This is another series where it became obvious that the creators (David Lynch and co.) had no earthly idea who, in fact, dunit, and were completely winging it. Despite crazy-high ratings in the beginning, once it was revealed that the emperor had no clothes, the fans trampled their young to flee toward the exits.

On the other hand, there are at least as many examples of things that hadn't been sorted out that ended up working okay. To take one at random: When Stan Lee and Steve Ditko were cranking out *Amazing Spider-Man,* they didn't know what the secret identity of the Green Goblin was going to be, even though they built it up as this big mystery. As the anecdote goes, Steve wanted it to be some random person the audience has never seen before, while Stan believed (correctly, in my opinion) that the audience would flip if the answer to this big "whoizzit?" turned out to be "Just some guy." In the end, they came up with an answer that, while not entirely logical, was not entirely *illogical,* either.

I've frequently argued that *Empire Strikes Back* is well-regarded by many fans because the middle of the story is easy to write; it's simple to ask all these thought-provoking questions, and hope to come up with the answers later. Sure, George Lucas may have known that Luke and Leia were siblings when he crafted that "No; there is another" enigmatic statement of Yoda's; maybe he stuck that salivalicious smooch between the two just to throw us off the track.

Nevertheless, the resolutions provided by *The Return of the Jedi* were, on the whole, more logical than not, and it was able to tie things together well enough that, even decades later, there's still the rush of imagination when the initial trumpets blair, and the universe is cohesive enough to provide plenty of story-telling potential.

So long as players and GM are on the same page, there's no reason that "page" can't be one the GM is making up on the fly, even going so far as to change a plot element when he (or the players!) come up with something better. Sure, this method carries some risks, but it can also give some big advantages, like leaving extra time for more gaming.

And if you *do* make up stuff that's wildly unpopular with the players, maybe you can placate them by giving them some extra experience points . . . or offering to switch the campaign to **World of Synnibarr.**

--Steven Marsh

The Omniscient Eye

Do Good-Looking Trees Have Great Personalities?

In some RPG systems, trees can be rendered sentient. It would be fun to go beyond the GM roleplaying them all as exact clones of Treebeard, and one aid toward that goal would be some guidelines for what kinds of personalities various species of tree have been portrayed as having in old myths. E.g. what is an oak like? Are date palms cheerful or morose? Do birches tend toward extroversion or introversion? And so forth . . .
     --Peter Knutsen

Let's approach this question from a botanist's perspective instead. Trees compete for space (sunlight), nutrients, and water. Most trees prefer sunny sites with non-acidic soil that is neither dry nor waterlogged. Some trees are better than others at surviving outside this optimal zone. Trees that can seize all the sunlight, nutrients, or water at a site will drive out other species. Usually, trees that cast heavy shade have seedlings that can sprout in heavy shade and vice versa. The personalities of tree species will be impacted by their natural ability to compete, the types of sites they prefer and occupy, and their experiences with other trees and humans now and in the past.

As a real-life example, we can look at tree history and politics in part of central Europe since the last ice age (about 14,000 years ago). It is an area of warm summers (seldom above 86° F), cool winters (seldom below -4°F), and long springs and falls. Extended dry periods are rare. This climate is optimal for forest vegetation and, were it not for human influence, the region would be more than 95% wooded. Humans have occupied the lowest elevations since the glaciers melted, and they made the hunter/gatherer to farmer/herder shift between 7,500 and 4,500 years ago. They expanded into the last uncolonized mountain areas 800 years ago.

Pine trees are strong, silent, shy frontiersmen. The Scots pine has a slender, wiry, often twisted trunk with scaly, deeply grooved, weather-reddened bark. It is crowned by a sparse, high clump of long, dark-green needles. These gritty explorers are long- lived, surviving up to 350 years in brutal conditions. Like most conifers, pines are unparalleled travelers because of wings on both seeds and pollen, which can spread for thousands of miles. When the melting glaciers opened up dangerous new frontiers, pines made the difficult trip into the unsettled territory. They were scattered widely, each dependent upon its own courage and ability. They battled cold, short seasons, and fierce winds that bent them into weathered dwarfs. Together with other hardy adventurers -- birch, aspen, juniper, rowan, and willow -- they advanced and retreated with climate shifts until other species began to join them, about 8,800 years ago. As more competitive tree species began to civilize the former wilderness, pines retreated to the edges of existence where less resourceful trees could not survive. Today, they grow in extremely dry soils (such as cliffs or some sands) and extremely wet and acidic, nutrient-poor soils (peat bogs). Dwarf mountain pine survives at the treeline. It adopts a shrub-like form and withstands extreme winter cold (under a blanket of snow), terrible winds, avalanches, rockslides, and hiking humans. Although shy with other trees, pines were encouraged by human activity, which opened up new treeless frontiers for them to explore.

Beeches are the pines' opposites: proud, cold, and aristocratic. The European beech is one of the most beautiful and magical trees in the forest. It has a straight, even, powerful trunk that gnarls with age. In the rain, its smooth, silver bark tarnishes gradually to black as it channels water in narrow rivulets down the trunk to its roots. Its glowing, emerald leaves are small, delicate, and translucent, edged with soft, white hairs. But these fragile-looking, oval leaves grow in thick layers and cast a heavy shade that chokes out all competitors. Beeches were late-comers in Central Europe, beginning their invasion roughly 6,000 years ago. They grow from heavy beech nuts that do not spread quickly without animal assistance. They advance in an orderly fashion into previously settled territory, conquering, fortifying, and establishing racially pure settlements in the richest lands. They defeat and destroy the former inhabitants with the heavy shade they cast, with a powerful root system that can completely desiccate soils, with a smothering blanket of

undecayed fallen leaves, and (according to one theory) poisons on the bark that are washed into the soil by rain. Beeches hold themselves to be a superior race and only allow "lesser trees" to survive in places that do not suit their preferences. They find areas that are too wet or too dry distasteful, and they particularly dread late frosts. The reign of the beeches was seriously disrupted by human activities. Beeches are less resilient than other tree species when faced with the indignities of timbering and browsing. By 2,800 years ago, humans were blocking the beech/fir advance on several fronts.

One of the only trees that cannot be broken by the absolute rule of the beeches is the fir: serene, calculating, and indomitable. The silver fir has a graceful, straight trunk with refined, grayish scales. Its short, glossy, dark blue-green needles are subtly and tastefully decorated with a pair of white stripes along the undersides. As with the beech, the fir's relatively small leaves grow thickly and cast a heavy shade. When space opens in a desirable neighborhood, both beech and fir seedlings can establish, but the faster-growing beech will ruthlessly acquire the property. Other young tree species struggle and die in the beech's shadow, but the fir refuses to capitulate. Patiently, the slender fir sapling endures decade after decade on the scraps of light the adult beeches allow it until old age or enemies (insects, animals, or fungi) take their toll. After two centuries or more, the beech falls. The fir, which has waited a lifetime in the oppressor's shadow, springs up to take its place. New beech seedlings are not quick enough to overtake it before it dominates the space. In this way, these two species formed mixed forests at the higher elevations of the beeches' domain. Fir was devastated by the coming of man, though it is not entirely clear why. Possible factors include timbering, fire, cutting branches as feed for livestock, and -- lately -- air pollution.

In a few protected, mountainous regions of central Europe, larch survived the ice age (along with the squat, bushy stone pine). The larches are a simple race that can survive in difficult, primitive conditions, but melt away under the onslaught of more sophisticated invaders. The European larch has ghostly, light-brown bark of layered, textured scales and tender, light green, deciduous needles in delicate whorls. Larch and stone pine survived the fluctuations of the post-glacial period until the climate finally began to improve about 10,000 years ago. They began expanding, hoping for a brighter future. These hopes were dashed when the melting glaciers and permafrost provided enough water for a more powerful competitor, the spruce, to take hold and explode across their territory.

The current lord of the highest elevations is the spruce, a hardened warrior and scheming diplomat. The Norway spruce has bark of small grayish or reddish scales on a ramrod straight trunk that can snap in high winds. It clings to the mountain with a broad, shallow root system and can be blown over in softer soils. Its branches are draped with sharp, bright green needles that hang like rich velvet. Spruce dominates the mountain baronies where the winters are so cold and the springs so short that the less-hardy deciduous trees are unable to survive. Spruce needles acidify the soil, scattering chemical caltrops to ensure that enemies cannot easily invade spruce territory. In the past, spruce and beech held a truce and exchanged ambassadors. At the elevational boundaries of their domains, mixed forests of spruce, fir, and beech often grew. In 1754[1], spruce betrayed the beeches by forming a pact with the beeches' old enemies, the humans. Spruce grows straight trunks of reasonable quality in a relatively short time. It provides the impatient, short-lived humans with lumber. It also creates pleasant, open woods that are easy to walk through and have edible mushrooms and an abundance of easily ignited fuel for campfires. In return, it has been extensively planted in the lower elevations, which it was unable to invade on its own. Once spruce had allied with humans, no other species could stand against it.

When temperatures rose (even higher than they are today) about 8,800 years ago, the oaks, elms, lindens, maples, alder, and hazel trees moved into the region. They were not the sturdy, independent frontier folk that the pines were. They formed friendly, open, sunny communities where several species co-existed harmoniously. They were defeated and scattered by the expansion of beech when temperatures and precipitation peaked about 6,000 years ago and by the expansion of firs when a cooling period started about 4,500 years ago. Survivors huddled at lower elevations, which were among the earliest and most drastically altered by humans. Although some of these trees offered humans beautiful wood, most were no more successful at negotiating peace with the humans than they had been with the beeches and firs. Most of them live 300 years or more (the linden with its lovely, heart-shaped leaves can reach the venerable age of 700) and that is simply too long to interest the impatient humans. It has been suggested that the elm population in the region was drastically reduced by humans cutting the leafy branches for livestock feed 4,500 to 3,000 years ago. Many of these species live today in captivity in parks and arboreta.

Along with European beech, the pedunculate oak is the species best adapted to the region's climate. Unlike the beeches, oaks are retiring and generous and do not press their claims to territory. Oaks have deeply grooved, wizened bark and bright, lobed leaves that do not cast heavy shade. They are wise, long-lived, and tolerant of other species. They do, however, draw the line at "tundra trash," birches and pines whose seedlings require full sunlight. The oaks can live to be 500, more than three times the lifetime of a birch. They drive birches out of any site with enough nutrients to support the oaks comfortably. Oaks and hornbeams claim the less oceanic east, where beeches fear to tread because of late frosts, and the hotter lowland areas, which are too dry to suit the beeches' demands.

Maples and ashes live fast and fling their resources to the wind, seldom living longer than 250 years. They are able to defend a position on beech soil in areas with excellent nutrient and moisture availability. Such sites are usually found in well-watered screes and narrow valleys, protected from the wind. Here, ideal water balance can lead to ideal nitrogen balance. With these vast resources are available to them, the maples and ashes are able to outgrow the beeches and avoid being starved into submission by the heavy beech shade. The lindens and elms then join them.

Hornbeam, the newcomer, wandered into the region less than 2,800 years ago. It thrived in a world already dominated by beeches by being easy-going and getting along well with other races. European hornbeam looks superficially quite similar to beech, but folksier and less elegant. The trunk is often ridged, and the silvery bark is slashed with dark gray mottling. The leaves are toothed instead of being edged with shining hairs. Hornbeam cohabits with oaks in regions beech does not deign to occupy. When humans began massively felling forests and browsing their livestock in them, hornbeam good-naturedly sent up new sprouts from its stumps. Since the proud beech abhorred stooping to such measures, hornbeam annexed vast amounts of beech territory. In return, it provided its human allies with brushy sprouts for browse and firewood. However, in modern times, the laid-back hornbeam has been overlooked in favor of spruce.

Willows are the soul of resilience. In many ways, they resemble fairy folk. There are countless willow species, which vary widely in appearance, preferences, and capabilities. Despite these vast differences, humans see them as a single entity. Their lives are ephemeral, lasting no more than a hundred years. The mercurial willows find a home in the cracks and edges of tree society. Each type has special abilities that allow it to survive in some place others trees consider uninhabitable or simply nonexistent. Willows were among the pioneers that followed the retreat of the glaciers. Dwarf willows survive above the treeline. Willows inhabit the nitrogen-poor sites along mountain streams, where the water level changes drastically throughout the day as the glacial melt varies. At lower elevations, where water levels cycle on a yearly rather than a daily basis, streams are hemmed by oak, ash, and elm. Yet even here, there are dangerous, flood-prone regions that are left to the indefatigable willows and cottonwoods. A willow bows before the wind or water, but its spirit is unbroken. Often, if an elemental force rips off a willow branch, the severed branch will root and grow in the place where it was flung down.

Feel free to use your imagination when role-playing trees. The information in this article comes from the forests that I know best, those in the Czech Republic at the turn of the 21st century. Since most of your games are probably not set in this place and this time, your trees may behave differently. Indeed, hornbeam exploits the dry end of its potential niche in the Czech Republic and the moist end in neighboring Germany (which is still central Europe). I have primarily discussed genera, but species within a single genus, like brothers and sisters, can be quite different. This article has concentrated on dominant species, and although highly competitive trees can form nearly pure stands in ideal environments, chance often results in a few non-dominants being scattered in regions they no longer claim.

Humans do not know all there is to know about trees. Our lives are simply too short to observe them effectively, and we have to rely on a lot of educated guesswork. Finally, trees are living creatures, and each will be an individual. While it is possible to describe the personality of a stereotypical member of a race, an actual member of that race may be radically different. Your players may indeed meet an egotistic pine or a shy beech. You can realistically give your trees any personality you wish, but hopefully this discussion of tree interaction can serve as insight into what might drive them to behave the way they do.

--Sierra Dawn Stoneberg Holt
Montana's resident expert on Czech language and flora

* * *

[1] Czech Directive for Forest and Timber

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.

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Pyramid Review

The Book of Unremitting Horror (for d20 Modern)

Published by [Pelgrane Press](#)

Written by Dave Allsop & Adrian Bott with Sarah Wroot

Cover by Dave Allsop

Illustrated by Dave Allsop with Grigoriy Kolyadin

156-page b&w softcover; $29.95

Better known for _[The Dying Earth Roleplaying Game,](#)_ based upon Jack Vance's novels of the same name, Pelgrane Press now dips its toe into the mainstream with its first **d20 System** sourcebook. **The Book of Unremitting Horror** is a supplement suited for use with _[d20 Modern](#)_ and Mongoose Publishing's **OGL Horror,** but whose contents could be used with almost any horror RPG. It is the creation of Dave Allsop, the illustrator best known as the creator of **SLA Industries**, the Scottish RPG of dark bureaucratic horror, and it is he that provides the artwork whilst working with his co-author, Adrian Bott. The result is that for the majority of its pages, **The Book of Unremitting Horror** is illustrated to great effect by Allsop's pen and inks.

From the outset, it is the art that draws you in, starting with the creepy front cover. It has to, as the back cover is devoid of the traditional blurb, instead displaying the simple phrase, "NEW TIMES DEMAND NEW NIGHTMARES." What you find inside lives up to that phrase, being a collection of creatures dark and disturbing, bizarre and bloody, an array of associated artifacts, a short guide to running horror campaigns, and finally a scenario employing one of the book's entries. All written with the contemporary campaign in mind.

What must be made clear about the Horrors found within this book is their adult tone. The material found on these pages is strong and none of these entries has been sanitized to suit a younger audience. Be warned that the creatures found in this book are not for the faint of heart.

Each creature is presented in the same stark style. First is its full-page illustration: dark, brutal, and disturbing, followed by its colorful text description. In keeping with the contemporary nature of the book's contents, these blurbs are presented in a variety of modes. Besides the more ordinary descriptive prose, they include diary entries, police interview transcripts, website reports, book excerpts, web blogs, and chat room excerpts. Also mentioned are several URLs, which Pelgrane Press has set up as dummy sites. Game statistics are presented in the standard fashion, although each stat block is rounded out with a "Horror entry," which is the type of saving throw called for with each creature using the rules from **OGL Horror**. In addition, there is a section entitled "All That Remains." This details the forensic traces left behind by one of the creatures and suggests how this evidence is more ordinarily interpreted.

The creatures can be roughly divided between the ancient and the modern, many of them recently so. The ancient, or at least the old, includes the Feral Drowner, a very dark interpretation of the Pooka; the Practice, a cabal of surgeons descended from Egyptian mummification that carry out unwholesome and sadistic procedures; the Clootie, Scottish water spirits that make nocturnal visits to lonely island communities; and the Drowner, another water spirit that likes to immerse its victims and is linked to an urban legend concerning a British information film of the Seventies. More modern are the Kooks, child sized Fey born out of the Summer of Love's autumn that take a single lonely child each Summer; the Scourger, a demon designed to do nothing monitor its target and return the information to its master; the Sisterites, which possess an innate ability to access the Internet, send e-mail, and access chat rooms to prey on and

seduce lonely men; and the Snuff Golem, a creature born out of the vile filming of its victims, and is driven to inflict a similar fate upon all those involved.

Some of the creatures, like the Feral Drowner or the Blossomer demon and its associated cult, could be used in an ordinary *d20 System* fantasy game, but the majority aren't appropriate. Beyond each entry's description, there is little in the way of advice on using the creature specifically, but both the color text and the write-ups are rife with possibilities that suggest how they could be used. These are often backed up by the accompanying collection of associated artifacts, such as the First Altar tied to a Feral Drowner cult, and the Scalpel of Mynarthitep, the ritual bronze knife prized by the Practice. It is a pity that not one of these artifacts is illustrated, and that once past the Horrors, the look of the book is, well, pedestrian.

The guide to running horror games is good, basic stuff, running through character types, weaponry, group motivation, patrons, and scenario types typical to a horror campaign. Much of it is obvious, but it is nevertheless a decent introduction to gaming the horror genre. It is backed up by a scenario, "The Final Case," designed for three to five characters of 3rd to 5th level. A private investigator acquaintance asks for help in case that will lead the characters into London's Goth and magical subcultures and also have them face several creatures from this book. As written, it is very specific to London, but could easily be set elsewhere, albeit though with the loss of a little flavor.

The aim of *The Book of Unremitting Horror* is really to provide a selection of fresh and original monsters for the GM to throw at his players. And this it certainly does, managing to draw from nightmarish folklore as much as its does a "splatterpunk" mentality. If there is a theme to them, it is that all are born of human drives and vices, whether greed, cruelty, ambition, and so on. Using these creatures is another matter; the authors suggest that they do not appear as a "Monster of the Week." That said, not all lend themselves to long-term play and many that do lack suggestions as how to develop them to that end, hampering the GM new to the horror genre. Hopefully this will be addressed in the book's sequel, *World of Unremitting Horror,* which will explore horror in long-term games and present a more coherent setting. Even so, this book deserves to find its contents used in RPGs, such as *Werewolf: The Forsaken, Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game,* and *Angel Roleplaying Game,* or an *X-Files*-style game, though they are not Eldritch enough for a standard *Call of Cthulhu* campaign.

Although both the advice and the scenario are good, in the end what stands out with this supplement are its creatures and their accompanying illustrations. These are quite nasty little creations, imaginative and original, and served up to full effect. *The Book of Unremitting Horror* is a rich meaty collection of horrors that should add new blood to any horror campaign.

--Matthew Pook

Shadows and Fogg, Part the Second

"'Have you just arrived from London?'
'Yes.'
'Heading for . . . ?'
'Bombay.'
'Very good, sir. You know that stamping serves no purpose and that we no longer require the presentation of passports?'
'I do,' answered Phileas Fogg; 'but I wish to use your stamp to prove I have passed through Suez.'"
-- Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days,* Chapter VII

Welcome to the second leg of our voyage around *Around the World in Eighty Days.* Our postulate is, well, foggy. In our first leg, we decided that Verne's novel is a record, whether information or disinformation, of a certain Working performed by an agent of one of several time- and reality-spanning conspiracies, as we established in our 200th Transmission some time ago. The novel recapitulates three cycles of the year as it spins Fogg around the earth; the decanic, the seasonal, and the astrological. Each of Fogg's 12 legs (by his own count) is one more sign of the zodiac passed through. Paris to Brindisi is Scorpio, and Brindisi to Suez is Sagittarius, an auspicious sign (an arrow of wisdom) if our earlier theory is true that Fogg is somehow connected with anomalous falls of meteorites. Finally, although Verne's earlier manuscript gave the (impossible) date of 1858 for Fogg's Voyage, we've resolved to stay with the canonical 1872 for the most part.

"It was obvious, on seeing Mr. Fogg maneuver, that he had been a sailor before."
-- Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days,* Chapter XXXIII

Much of the novel, necessarily, takes place at sea. Verne, like Fogg, was an avid yachtsman, sailing all over the Mediterranean and up to the British Isles, on his yacht the *Saint-Michel.* One is immediately reminded, in that junction between sea and St. Michael, of Mont-Saint-Michel, the so-called ley anchor of the "dragon line" on its rocky fastness off the coast of Normandy. Is the 37th parallel of Verne's famous *Children of Captain Grant* (also called *In Search of the Castaways*) a similar exercise in magical working? Was Lord Glenarvan's circumnavigation of the earth -- set in 1864 -- another rehearsal for the Fogg Working? Note that the 37th parallel, well, parallels the number of chapters in *Around the World in Eighty Days.* Likewise, 37 kabbalistically equates to "HBL," which is to say "vapor," or . . . "fog." Very interesting. Similarly, Verne's choice of names for his yacht is another indicator that Michel Lamy might be onto something when he taps Verne as a key Rosicrucian initiate of the "Angelic Society," Le Brouillard. Saint Michael -- Saint-Michel -- is, after all, an archangel. Verne wasn't all angels on the ocean, of course; in a few surviving letters he refers to a "unique siren" whom he entertained on his yacht -- was he learning secrets from the Lamia, or dickering with the maidens of the cantosphere for pearls of story?

"Rarely was he seen on deck. He made little effort to observe this Red Sea, so redolent in memories and the theatre of the opening scenes of human history. He did not come and observe the fascinating towns crowded along its banks, whose picturesque silhouettes sometimes appeared on the horizon. He did not even dream about the dangers of this Gulf of Arabia which the Classical historians Strabo, Arrian, Artemidorus, and Idrisi always spoke of with horror. In the olden days sailors never ventured out on it without first consecrating their journey with propitiatory sacrifices."
-- Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days,* Chapter IX

According to Verne's novel, Fogg departs Suez on time on October 9, 1872. That date is 290 years after Pope Gregory decreed the Gregorian Calendar, which interestingly eliminated the days October 5 through 14 -- a hole in time through which Fogg easily slips, whether to gather meteorites for apotheosis or to prepare to enter India Ultraterrestria, the domain of the Sphinxes. Either way, the trip down the Red Sea is both uneventful and uncanny. Fogg plays whist the whole way down, reading the flows of magic or the threads of the future, or possibly just running programs in his external operating system. Response is left to Passepartout, who notes that "I seem to be travelling in a dream." When they reach Aden, he sees the basins carved by the "engineers of King Solomon" and then they emerge through the Bab el-Mandab, the "Gate of Tears" into the Indian Ocean. Here Fogg joins Sinbad, taking on psychic juice from the

previous seven initiatory voyages to "India," the uttermost Otherworld. He has refused to make the "propitiatory sacrifices," inviting death and the attention of the guardians of the Gate.

"Captain Nemo was an Indian, Prince Dakkar, the son of a rajah of the then independent territory of Bundelkhand and a nephew of the Indian hero, Tippu-Sahib. His father sent him to Europe when he was ten years old in order that he receive a complete education with the secret intention that he would fight one day with equal arms against those whom he considered to be the oppressors of his country."
-- Jules Verne, *The Mysterious Island,* Chapter XVI

Fogg arrives in India on October 20, 1872, just as he is finishing his 33rd rubber of whist. When Bombay is sighted, all the planets but the Moon are up -- the virgin is hidden and the Sphinxes are alert. He remains outside of time, having gained two days on his schedule, and Passepartout once more feels the uncanny nature of the voyage, unable to believe that he is traveling through India. In India, the novel leaves not only time but geography behind. Fogg's train stops in Rothal station -- the tracks end, and there is no straight path ahead. Interestingly, there is no Rothal station on any map of India, nor is there, contra Verne, a Kholby, Pillaji, or Kandallah in the region. That this concentration of fictive locations comes just when Fogg has left the rails -- literally -- cannot be mere coincidence. No, Fogg is deep inside India Ultraterrestria, riding an elephant half-mad and half-sane (only half-trained for war, driven by a similarly dualist Parsee). This entry into the Otherworld was signposted by Verne's references to "hypogaea" and "grottoes" on the way from Bombay. This leg of the journey is the third of eight: Samhain, the entry into Death; it is the fifth of twelve: Aquarius, the house of Saturn, master of death and time.

What is Fogg doing here? He is drawing a line behind him, laying down footprints to bind the Sphinxes into the reality that MI-8 enforces. In the novel, he is aiming for Allahabad, where there was a fall of fish in 1836, and a fall of "perfectly similar" stones in 1802. Obviously, the local reality is weak, and Fogg again homes in on the anomaly. And he is trying to lure his foes into revealing his true target. He enters the "uncontrolled" kingdom of Bundelkhand, still in 1872 a no-space in British Imperial cartography. Here, he meets a clutch of Tarot cards -- the Juggernaut Car, or Chariot, the Emperor (reversed in death), the Empress (Aouda), and of course Death. Aouda, the Parsee heiress, is trapped in a suttee, a marriage sacrifice, overseen by the goddess Kali and defended by an army of murderous Thugs. This is the Sphinx court with a vengeance, down to the ceremonial necrolatry seen in their Egyptian kingdom. But Fogg has been ready for this encounter with the Maiden Aouda and the Mother Kali -- he gave an offering of twenty guineas to the Crone in London and bought her forebearance. He rescues the Maiden, although interestingly it is Passepartout (a proxy? a hijacker?) who actually undergoes the shamanic entry into death, masquerading as the dead rajah of Bundelkhand and rising again with Aouda in his grasp.

Bundelkhand would still have been in mutinous uproar in 1858 -- and at its heart would have been the Rajah Dakkar, who would later go on to a piratical career as Captain Nemo. Verne presents the identification of Nemo and Dakkar in *The Mysterious Island,* but there are some major problems with it. We are told that Captain Nemo is an old man -- nearly 70 -- when he tells his life story on the Mysterious Island. "It has been thirty years" since he left India in 1858, which would set his present in 1888 -- and "sixteen years" since his encounter with Professor Arronax in 1867, which would likewise set his present in 1883. And the discovery of Dakkar in *The Mysterious Island* itself takes place in 1868 -- during the events of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* that it supposedly recalls from sixteen years ago! Nemo and the *Nautilus* are unstuck in time -- the Maelstrom that seemingly sank his submarine was a temporal vortex, possibly a mine set to prevent the *Nautilus* from circumnavigating the globe in 1867. So who is Nemo? If he is Dakkar, he may well be a Sphinx, but he has the technological feel of a Reptoid or a Lemurian (the *Nautilus* draws electricity straight from seawater) and the manias (for art, Antarctica, and U-boats) of an Ahnenerbe agent. (In *The Other Log of Phileas Fogg,* Philip Jose Farmer postulates that Dakkar is not merely Nemo but also Professor Moriarty. This is just silly.) He might, in fact, be both -- in Verne's original manuscript for *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea,* Nemo was a Polish nobleman. Perhaps the Maelstrom overwrote the Polish Nemo with the Indian (Sphinx?) Nemo, as the *Nautilus* passed through the Otherworld.

"At half-past twelve the train halted at Benares Station. The Brahmin legends maintain that this town is built on the spot where Kasi was situated, suspended in space between the zenith and the nadir, like Mohammed's Tomb."
-- Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days,* Chapter XIV

Benares is halfway between heaven and Earth. It was the original Sarnath, where the Buddha first preached suspension from reality. This stop thus reflects another Vernian concern, the city or island or cavern apart from humanity. Verne has a strong utopian strain running through him, from *The Begum's Fortune* to *The Mysterious Island* to *The Black Indies.* He was a Saint-Simonian, following that French reactionary socialist who (in another weird parallel to Merovingian symbolism) saw society in the shape of bees, and vice versa. He was familiar with, and perhaps influenced by, the utopian Fourier, who helped shape the American Spiritualist movement and who went so far as to assert that the world was a living electrical organism. Verne was friends with the Saint-Simonian and self-proclaimed Druid Dr. Ange Guepin, and with the Reclus brothers, two anarchists who proclaimed the "City of Good Will" and narrowly escaped deportation to Devil's Island as a result. Verne thus becomes a kind of living transmission belt between the wild dreams of the Lemurians or Sphinxes (complete with aeronefs and moon-cannons -- echoes no doubt of ancient flying vimana craft) and the human world to be influenced by them. Which perhaps makes it all the stranger that he should be the conduit for the Fogg Working, if it was indeed an attempt to pinch off (or hijack) the energies of India Ultraterrestria for the benefit of MI-8 and their Occult Empire.

"The applause was just increasing and the orchestra's instruments bursting like claps of thunder, when the pyramid suddenly jerked to and fro, the equilibrium was lost . . . and the whole structure came crashing down like a house of cards."
-- Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days,* Chapter XXIII

Having reached Calcutta, Fogg and Passepartout must face the stern Judge Obadiah -- Justice in our Tarot progress -- and pay ransom to escape the Otherworld, just like Heracles or Orpheus. They then sail on the *Rangoon* past the (devil-haunted?) Andaman Islands, past "beings on the lowest rung of the human scale." On October 31, Fogg reaches Singapore, again playing whist the whole time, manipulating his voyage with the constant interplay of cards.

Fogg reaches Hong Kong on November 6. This is the seventh leg of the twelve, Aries in our symbolic zodiac. Moreover, it is Yule, the season after Samhain (and as we've seen, directly after Samhain -- October 31 -- in Singapore according to the text). And during Yule, the King dies and returns to life; and once again Passepartout plays proxy for Fogg. He is dosed with opium by Fix (possibly working for the Lemurians or the Sphinxes attempting a counter-attack -- but playing into Fogg's hands all the same), and is placed insensible on a boat of the dead, the *Carnatic.* The real *S.S. Carnatic,* as Verne would surely have known, went down in the Gulf of Suez in 1869, killing 31 people. Is this why Fogg failed to offer sacrifices at Suez, at the entrance to the Red Sea -- the hope of catching a ride on the ship of the dead, cutting a wake through the twelve hours of the night and into the bright Pacific?

If so, his plan came true only for Passepartout -- Fogg was forced to fight the tempest between Hong Kong and Shanghai. While Fogg was delayed by the storm, Passepartout was forced to take a job in a Yokohama circus. He played a Long Nose clown, "under the special protection of the god Tengu." Tengu is a mischievous bird spirit who preys on travelers -- not, you'd think, ideal for Passepartout (and therefore Fogg) to venerate by service. (Tengu smells like a Reptoid to me.) But sure enough, Passepartout and Fogg reunited under Tengu's gaze and at that point Passepartout broke the human pyramid that Tengu's Hognels had formed on top of a Juggernaut. He had clowned the clowns, misruled the mummers, and he and Fogg escaped out onto the Pacific on November 14, 1872. During their Pacific crossing, Verne manages to lose four more days -- at 12 knots, the *General Grant* crosses the "4,700 miles" of the Pacific Ocean in only 17 days, not the 21 Verne quotes. The "wide gap of time" stretches open, and more ejecta fall through it. Cinders fell on the Seven Stones lightship off Cornwall on November 13, 1872, and a swarm of meteors appeared instead of the predicted Biela's Comet two weeks later, as Fogg and company steam across the Pacific. The Fogg Working continues its spin, and the earth and the heaven jerk and wobble under it.

Next: Shadows and Fogg, Part the Third: In Which Fogg Discovers the Land Promised to the Saints

–5

The Commonwealth Skyhook

by Paul Drye

Most European-dominated timelines near Homeline's tech level are suffering in the aftermath of world-wide, industrialized wars. Western civilization was inclined to war for hundreds of years, but the traumas of the Great War invariably shattered the hierarchies and mores of that society. There are a few exceptional timelines, though, usually where one power was so predominant that it could scare off rivals, or finish any fight quickly. These present an experience peculiar to Homeline eyes: advanced in science and technology, often more so than home, but with the attitudes of the 19th century warped only by incremental change.

Britannica-9 is one of these, and its symbol is the Commonwealth Skyhook. One of only a few orbital beanstalks known to Infinity, the skyhook is an exercise in cognitive dissonance. Though an obviously advanced piece of technology, its details and setting hark back to the days of steam railroads and colonialism.

History

Britannica-9 saw the English Civil War run rather differently after Oliver Cromwell died at the Second Battle of Newbury. Charles I still lost the throne (but fled the country rather than being executed) and Thomas Fairfax maintained the Parliamentary government into the 1670s. By then any thought of a royalist restoration had been eliminated by two failed Stuart invasions supported by France. England drifted into permanent republicanism by 1700.

In the 316 years since, the Britannic Commonwealth has expanded steadily, integrating the outlying parts of Britain and colonizing America. The Union parliament meets every two years in London, bringing delegates from around the Dominions -- those parts of the Commonwealth that have equal political status with the home islands. In earlier days this arrangement teetered on the brink due to the travel times from places like Oregon and Madagascar, but since the 1820s the telegraphs and then other newer technologies have destroyed those barriers.

From Homeline's point of view, Britannica-9 is worth exploring because its technological pace is enough ahead to be interesting, but not so far ahead that it can't be reverse engineered. For example, England's somewhat more meritocratic society pushed forwards a Newton-level genius who developed the Laws of Electromagnetism in the early 1800s. Social opportunity provided a further boost to innovation, as making a fortune in business would make one's life too. The Commonwealth entered TL8 in the 1950s and is well on its way to TL9 in several fields.

Infinity is doubly interested in the timeline because they believe -- correctly -- that Centrum has chosen Britannica-9 as a bridgehead. It's in Quantum-6, accessible to Centrum, and is exactly the sort of world Centrum likes: one with a hegemonic, English-speaking empire.

The centuries of Britannic predominance may be coming to a close, however. The Russian and Chinese Empires have,

after so many years of mistrust, cemented an alliance obviously aimed at the British. Worse, India has risen in rebellion after being refused Dominion status yet again. It doesn't seem like the rest of the Commonwealth has enough strength to stop them in the long run. If India is lost to Britain, what then?

The Skyhook

Beginning in the early 2000s, and finished in 2011, the Commonwealth Skyhook is this timeline's road to the stars. The Britannic presence in space has increased by 20-fold in the five years since. Some of the projects made trivial by the tower are orbital factories now churning out goods, an inner-system exploratory mission based on asteroid 1998 WT24, and an extensive GPS system.

Holdfast Port: One end of Britannica-9's greatest achievement is on Batam Island, just to the south of the Britannic port of Singapora. This puts it a short distance north of the equator in Indonesia (or, as it is still called here, the Dutch East Indies). At its base -- called the Holdfast -- the skyhook is enormous, a geodesic gridwork tetrahedron five miles to a side and three and a half miles tall. Homeliners find it reminiscent of the Eiffel Tower, though on a vastly greater scale.

The endless struts and struts within struts that make up the base of the tower are deliberately fractal. As well as reducing the amount of material needed to build the installation, it makes it internally redundant and thus more resistant to accident. The skyhook's engineers have determined that nothing short of a nuclear explosion could cut their bridge to the stars, at the holdfast end.

The human side of the port is the city built largely under the pyramid. Some of it is in the open air, but most people save travel time by sticking within a couple of miles of the skyhook's tether. While under the structure one can look up and see cracks of blue sky, but most of the view is blocked by the intricate girders and guy wires of the Holdfast.

By Britannic standards Holdfast Port is a wretched hive, but out-timers used to, say, pre-Columbian Tenochtitlan or mid-19th century Five Points will find it tame. The central portion of the city is actually quite developed, with the support crews and people running businesses based on the skyhook usually being white Britannics or prosperous Cantonese.

More to the tastes of adventurers might be Semba, the port district in the northwest of the island. It's growing incredibly quickly, and buildings are being thrown up in every manner possible. This includes labor-intensive ones for sheer lack of construction equipment, so there are plenty of low-paying jobs for workers both here and on the wharfs. Most of the people are from East Asia and the colonial parts of the Commonwealth, and visitors will see signs in and hear languages as diverse as Mandarin, Filipino, Arabic, and Malagache, as well as native Malay. Many can get by in English, though, broken or otherwise. Despite the best efforts of the fussy Britannics, this is still a dusty, noisy place, and certainly the place to go if you've got something shady in mind.

To the south is Punggur, which is the residence for Holdfast and Singapore's elite. If the adventuring group can arrange to move in rarefied social circles, they'll find Punggur an area of widely spaced, airy mansions surrounding a large tropical lagoon. It's quite pleasurable surroundings, as long as the ubiquitous servants don't tweak one's conscience.

The Tether: A ribbon runs up the skyhook for 22,236 miles, all the way to a geostationary point above the Earth. It tapers as it approaches the Earth and is a superficially ridiculous eighth of an inch in diameter when it enters the roof of the Holdfast. It is, accordingly, made of extremely strong carbon nanotube fibers with an internal core of superconducting material that carries power from solar panels at the top of the skyhook to power both the elevator and the port. The Tether is coated with a gold film to prevent corrosion, and though only a few atoms thick it adds a yellow cast to the ribbon once one is close enough to see it.

Churchill Station: Named after John, the fifth Commonwealth Chancellor, not the never-to-be-born Winston, the station is at the functional top of the tether. Strictly speaking there's another, even longer length of ribbon past the station acting as a counterweight, but this is only used to launch interplanetary missions. Churchill Station is the heart of the Commonwealth's power in space, an installation dwarfed only by the Holdfast itself.

The station is a Bernal Sphere, about 1,500 feet in diameter and rotating almost two times per minute to produce an apparent Earth gravity when on the equator. The sphere is wrapped around a non-rotating core that lets the tether pierce through the station, as well as provide some zero-G space where industries can use it. In addition to housing the station personnel and workspaces (mostly traffic control and maintenance), Churchill also hosts four local spacecraft for transferring people and cargo to other facilities hanging in orbit nearby. There is a large cargo bay adjacent to each of the docking bays, as well as smaller maintenance craft.

Traveling on the Skyhook: There are two kinds of cars that move up and down the side of the tether. Both are about 100 feet in length and 30 feet in diameter. For cargo cars, the interior is divided by bulkheads, with sensitive items held in sections lined with water and lead to prevent damage from the Van Allen Belts. Human transport cars are further subdivided into staterooms, since the travel time up to Churchill Station is just under 23 hours. At first these accommodations were spartan, but in the last two years some have been appointed in luxury; travelers can buy "Upper Class" or "Lower Class" passages.

Upon leaving the Holdfast, the cars -- up to three in chain, of either type -- travel at 120 miles per hour until they reach 60 miles in altitude. There, a set of electromagnetic rings surrounding the tether push the train to 1,000 miles per hour. The cars are only marginally aerodynamic, but at that height, air resistance is no longer an issue.

Passengers are reassured that, in the unlikely event of a catastrophic accident, the cars are capable of unpowered re-entry, and would splash down below a bouquet of parachutes, likely somewhere in the Indian Ocean west of Sumatra.

The Chaser

Britannica-9's space age began in the 1930s, and through sheer accumulation its low-earth and geosynchronous orbits are even more cluttered than Homeline's. This presents a problem for the skyhook, as orbital precession means that sooner or later every piece of space junk with a perigee under 22,000 miles can potentially impact with the tether. Daud bin Vasan owes his career to this fact.

He is one of a few dozen chasers, people who scout Earth orbit for debris and either retrieve it or (for larger pieces) get it to re-enter and burn up. This is a two-person job, but as the skills needed to operate in space are in high demand few stay for very long. Daud gets a new partner every six months or so. He stays at it, though, thinking himself most useful doing what he's doing -- and in truth, getting to watch the Earth with only his spacesuit between them.

He is a Malay man, of average height and build, with dark skin, black hair shaved very close, and nearly black eyes. He has a high forehead and large, looping eyebrows that give him a permanently surprised expression.

Daud's role is to be the low-level insider who can introduce the adventurers to the inner workings of the skyhook. While his job puts him in low-earth orbit, he can be encountered anywhere in the facility. He lives in Churchill Station three weeks while working, then gets one week off to visit his family in Port Holdfast. The chaser is also useful to fill potential gaps in the group's skills, as he has plenty of experience in orbital operations.

Daud bin Vasan   *154 points*

Age 29; Human; 5'9"; 160 lbs.

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 10 [0].
Damage 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16 lbs.; HP 9 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 10 [0].
Basic Speed 6 [10]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 9; Parry 0.

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].

CF: Malayan (Native) [0].
Languages: Malay (Native) [0] English (Accented/Literate) [4].

Advantages

3D Spatial Sense [10]; Ambidexterity [5]; Immunity to Space Sickness [5].

Disadvantages

Loner (12 or less) [-5]; Post-Combat Shakes (12 or less) [-5]; Restricted Diet (Halal) (Very Common) [-10]; Stubbornness [-5]; Workaholic [-5].
Quirks: Defends his job as more important than it seems; Tidy [-2].

Skills

Astronomy/TL8-12 (IQ-1) [2]; Computer Operation/TL8-14 (IQ+1) [2]; Electronics Operation/TL8 (Communications)-14 (IQ+1) [4]; Electronics Operation/TL8 (Sensors)-14 (IQ+1) [4]; First Aid/TL8 (Human)-13 (IQ+0) [1]; Free Fall-16 (DX+4) [8]; Freight Handling/TL8-15 (IQ+2) [8]; Mathematics/TL8 (Applied)-12 (IQ-1) [2]; Physics/TL8-11 (IQ-2) [2]; Piloting/TL8 (Low-Performance Spacecraft)-14 (DX+2) [4]; Smuggling-12 (IQ-1) [1]; Spacer/TL8-16 (IQ+3) [8]; Vacc Suit/TL8-16 (DX+4) [16].

The Agent

The I-Cops broke up a Centrum ring in Britannica-9's London three years ago, and the Interworld Service has decided to try something a little bit different this time. Reasoning that the last infiltration was too visible, they've settled on a single agent as the thin edge of a wedge. Since Britannica-9 is viewed as a highly strategic timeline, they've picked out one of their best.

Grade 6 Alice Sedman is 55, quite old for a field agent, but as experienced and as talented as they come. If it weren't for her stated preference to be out-time, she'd have been promoted to a Grade 7 policy wonk well before now. In the case of Britannica-9 she is particularly useful as she can speak both English and Chinese, and is currently trying to get Russian under her belt so as to have access to all three powers in this world. Her job is to advance the interests of the Centrum, at first by working alone though the plan is for her to build up a network of native catspaws. She has, however, only been in Britannica-9 for six weeks, so her task is just beginning.

She is a short, chubby woman, with frizzy gray hair that she does not dye so as to look older than she is. She uses her real name, but otherwise assumes the role of a small importer/exporter. This is unusual for a woman in still-sexist Britannica-9, but not so much as to draw attention.

Her role is to be a danger to Infinity personnel without necessarily being an antagonist. She could become one, but for now Britannica-9 is fairly stable and in the short run other issues are likely to drive adventures. Once introduced, think of her relationship to the adventuring group as like that between spies during the Cold War. It would be nice to remove her from the picture, but she has much in common with Infinity agents and she can be a useful "enemy of my enemy" at times.

Alice Sedman   *200 points*

Human; 5'3"; 155

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 14 [5]; Per 13 [0]; FP 12 [3].

Basic Speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 9; Parry 11 (Brawling).

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].
CF: Centrum (Native) [0].
Languages: Centrum English (Native) [0]; Chinese (None/Literate) [2]; Mandarin Chinese (Accented/None) [2]; Russian (Broken/Semi-Literate) [2].

Advantages

Centrum Rank 6 [60]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Fit [5]; Luck [15]; Resistant (Disease) (Occasional) (+8) [5]; Telecommunication (Radio) [10].

Disadvantages

Code of Honor (Centrum) [-5]; Curious (12 or less) [-5]; Duty (The Service) (15 or less (almost always)) (Extremely Hazardous) [-20]; Honesty (12 or less) [-10]; Overweight [-1]; Secret Identity (Imprisonment or Exile) [-20]; Sense of Duty (Centrum) (Large Group) [-10]; Social Stigma (Second-Class Citizen: Woman) [-5]; Stubbornness [-5].
Quirks: Dislikes being too close to authority; Obsessed with Thai food [-2].

Skills

Administration-12 (IQ-1) [1]; Beam Weapons/TL8 (Pistol)-14 (DX+2) [4]; Boating/TL8 (Motorboat)-11 (DX-1) [1]; Brawling-14 (DX+2) [4]; Computer Hacking/TL8-11 (IQ-2) [2]; Computer Operation/TL8-14 (IQ+1) [2]; Computer Programming/TL8-11 (IQ-2) [1]; Current Affairs/TL8 (Politics)-13 (IQ+0) [1]; Electronics Operation/TL8 (Parachronic)-13 (IQ+0) [2]; Electronics Repair/TL8 (Parachronic)-12 (IQ-1) [1]; Expert Skill (Cliodynamics)-13 (IQ+0) [4]; First Aid/TL8 (Human)-13 (IQ+0) [1]; Free Fall-11 (DX-1) [1]; Guns/TL8 (Pistol)-14 (DX+2) [4]; Mathematics/TL8 (Applied)-11 (IQ-2) [1]; Merchant-12 (IQ-1) [1]; Physics/TL8-10 (IQ-3) [1]; Research/TL8-12 (IQ-1) [1]; Running-12 (HT+1) [4]; Savoir-Faire (Centrum)-15 (IQ+2) [4]; Streetwise-14 (IQ+1) [4]; Swimming-14 (HT+3) [4].

The Rebel

The Indian Colony has been the source of much of the Commonwealth's strength through the last 200 years, but for some time its citizens have been agitating for full Dominion status. Unfortunately, while the Commonwealth made an early start on meritocracy, they've lagged behind Homeline since the turn of the 20th century. The thought of granting non-white people true equality is problematic, and is an impossibility when one considers that India's people outnumber all the other Dominions' put together. That kind of shift in political power is too radical for anyone in charge to consider. After another attempt to come up with a solution failed in the House of Commons, the subcontinent was shattered by rebellion.

The situation there is chaotic, with the Commonwealth pouring in troops but utterly unable to bring the rebels to heel. Their opponent has no central command, and in fact consists of over a dozen different groups big and small. For the purposes of visiting the skyhook, however, the most important rebels are the ones looking to export the violence outside of India proper: the Agni Kshatriya Brigade.

The focus on the Kshatriya can in turn be put on one man, Prithu Akram Jerath. Jerath is an example of the banality of evil, looking more like a junior university professor than a killer: slim, with a hatchet face and a neat mustache. He's responsible for a campaign of terror in India, including poisoning the water supply of downtown Hyderabad and the kidnapping and killing of Britannic soldiers around Karachi. Now he's come to the Skyhook looking for a twisted public relations coup. He wants to cut the tether, hopefully killing many people in dramatic fashion.

To that end he and a small group of associates have sailed into Holdfast Port and are looking to smuggle cyclonite plastic explosives (essentially like Homeline's C4) onto a tether car and detonate it just above the atmosphere. This would cause most of the tether (as well as Churchill Station) to float upwards, stranding anyone above the cut point. This would essentially doom them to starvation as the world of Britannica-9 hasn't got enough orbital lift capacity outside of the skyhook to support or rescue more than a few off-earth personnel.

Prithu Akram's role is as an antagonist. Depending on the GM's needs, he can be a straight villain, or a more sympathetic (if still villainous) figure. After all, there is no doubt that Indians in the Britannic Commonwealth are second-class citizens, and he is fighting to end that. He is also a useful tool to bring Homeliners and the Centrum together. Sympathetic or not, the players are going to be inclined to stop him from engaging in grand-scale sabotage and murder; similarly, Agent Sedman will want to stop him from destabilizing Britannic hegemony. The situation then becomes interesting when Jerath is neutralized but the two out-time groups are left aware of one another with no more reasons to ally.

Prithu Akram Jerath   *175 points*

Human; 5'10"; 155 lbs.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 5.5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 0.

Social Background

TL:8 [0].
CF: Britannic [1]; Indian Hindu (Native) [0].
Languages: English (Native) [6]; Hindi (Native) [0].

Advantages

Ally (75% of starting points) (Group Size (6-10); Minion (+2); 12 or less) [54]; Luck [15]; Single-Minded [5].
Perks: Honest Face [1].

Disadvantages

Callous [-5]; Intolerance (Britannics) [-5]; On the Edge (12 or less) [-15]; Paranoia [-10].
Quirks: Emulates historical freedom fighters; Loves disguises; Tongue-tied around women [-3].

Skills

Chemistry/TL8-11 (IQ-1) [2]; Computer Operation/TL8-12 (IQ+0) [1]; Disguise/TL8 (Human)-13 (IQ+1) [4]; Driving/TL8 (Automobile)-12 (DX+1) [4]; Explosives/TL8 (Demolition)-14 (IQ+2) [8]; Fast-Talk-11 (IQ-1) [1]; Forgery/TL8-12 (IQ+0) [4]; Guns/TL8 (Pistol)-13 (DX+2) [4]; Lockpicking/TL8-14 (IQ+2) [8]; Stealth-14 (DX+3) [12]; Strategy (Land)-10 (IQ-2) [1]; Streetwise-15 (IQ+3) [12].

Other Adventure Seeds

Murder on the Orbital Express: The group are headed down on the skyhook, part of a total complement of 13. One of the others aboard, American millionaire Hobart Briand, is found murdered two hours into the journey. He has 12 stab wounds, which will hopefully trigger a memory in one of the players. If not, pick one of the characters to realize

that the murderer is echoing the set up of a famous Homeline mystery novel. Not only is there the issue that this book has never been published on Britannica-9, the character also remembers the end of the novel. If things hold true to form, forensic analysis by the police after the car arrives in Holdfast Port will show that each of the other passengers -- including the characters -- stabbed Briand once, executing him. The investigators now have less than a day in a locked car to establish that at least they were not involved.

Running on Time: The Dockworkers Guild has gone on strike, and cargo is not being loaded or unloaded. Tensions are rising as it's wartime and the skyhook is needed, so there are soldiers and heightened security at both ends of the skyhook. This is bad news for the Infinity team, as a small item -- anything smaller than a suitcase will do -- is needed on the ground and is stuck on Churchill Station. Passenger service is still running, so their mission is to get into the right bonded warehouse on the station, recover the item, and smuggle it down to Singapora where it will be picked up and taken to the Infinity personnel who need it.

Follow that Car: The agents are required to apprehend a known cross-time criminal, who is at Churchill Station when they catch up to him. He enters a car just before it leaves, and the pursuit is just too late to keep him from being whisked down to Earth. They could follow him, but it's 45 minutes to the next passenger car and that's 45 minutes the quarry will have to disappear into the warrens of Holdfast Port. Their best bet might be to somehow involve the authorities, who can radio ahead to their groundling counterparts, but how to convince them?

Using the Commonwealth Skyhook In Other Settings

The skyhook is easy to use in a fantasy campaign if one considers the ultimate origin of the real-world term "beanstalk." Magical routes to the sky have a long pedigree, including not only Jack but the Bifrost Bridge and the Tower of Babel. The main difficulty is in deciding who controls the skyhook and what is at the top. In most legends the trip is a once-in-a-lifetime event, and the Commonwealth Skyhook is intended to be more mundane, if still awe-inspiring. One possibility is to make the magical version an artifact of the lost, magically advanced civilization that most fantasy settings possess. Be it star elves or the First Human Empire who made it, at the top is a decrepit but still partially functioning wondrous city that is the jewel in the crown of some current nation. Holdfast Port is then transformed into a base camp town for adventurers exploring the 90% of the sky city that is ruined.

Science fiction settings may have trouble with beanstalks because most of them have either magic rocket drives or anti-gravity, which obviates having to build an expensive megastructure. Recent advances in real-world materials technology mean that beanstalks are not fictional enough for far future campaigns any more. Here Britannica-9's 19th century anachronistic side comes to the rescue. Once a beanstalk is built, it's a sunk cost. If one had been built before the magic tech was invented, it's reasonable enough to keep it running as long as it uses no more than a shoestring budget. So the skyhook really is one or two hundred years old, and appointed in an antique style, as no one's bothered to redecorate since five Galactic Emperors ago.

Integrating a beanstalk with a modern-day campaign is probably trickiest of all, as an existing one would be as famous as anything in the world. Suddenly declaring that there's one out Singapore way will likely break players' suspension of disbelief. The solution is to jettison the working skyhook and replace it with one in the process of construction. If the project is relatively new, it would be a cutting edge, long-term project tied to the prestige of a major nation, in the best tradition of slightly-too-advanced spy movie technology. Repurpose Prithu Akram Jerath as a more typically motivated terrorist type and Alice Sedman as a sympathetic-but-opposed Chinese or Russian agent, and you're in business.

Suggested Reading

- *The Fountains of Paradise,* Arthur C. Clarke.
- *Planetes, Vol. 1-2,* Makoto Yukimura.
- "Transactions of the Royal Martian Geographical Society"
- *Ministry of Space,* Warren Ellis.

Icosahedron Adventures

Dwarven Martial Arts

by Owen K.C. Stephens

Most fantasy *d20 System* games either have no real rules for martial arts, or assume all races have access to the same fighting styles. The fact that different *cultures* in the real world developed distinct martial traditions argues strongly that groups with different *physiology* could be expected to do at least as much. This is especially true for races that have more than just a different set of ability score modifiers. Among the core fantasy races, the most obvious example of this is dwarves.

While it's possible to simply assign different real-world fighting abilities to various races in a fantasy game (Dwarven Grenadiers using flashing-blades-style fencing and explosives rather than muskets), it seems more likely that a short, stout, slow species would develop its own fighting arts designed to maximize their strengths and minimize their weaknesses. Of course by the standard rules, dwarves do have some trained combat advantages (+1 to attacks vs orcs and goblinoids, +4 AC vs giants), but that's just a drop in the potential fighting bucket.

Thus this article presents dwarven martial arts styles, referred to as "battlecraft" by the dwarves themselves. It starts by presenting generic rules for how to pick up a fighting style, then outlines two fighting styles designed specifically for dwarves. In many ways these are a bit stereotypical, but that allows them to match the most common vision of dwarves more easily. A GM looking for something more creative can easily use these as a template for developing other fantasy fighting styles.

Martial Arts

The martial arts system comes in three parts -- a martial arts rating, one or more style feats, and the maneuvers you select for each style.

Your martial art rating is equal to your ranks in Profession (martial artist) plus your base attack bonus. You only need to buy a single Profession (martial artist) skill -- additional styles are handled by buying new feats. As your martial arts rating increases, you earn new maneuvers for each style you know.

Each style is a feat with the same name as the style. As with any feat it has prerequisites that must be met before it can be taken. Once you have taken a style feat you may select one minor maneuver. Every 5 points of martial arts rating you gain after taking a style feat (including any points earned the same level you took the style feat) allows you to choose one more maneuver. You may never have more moderate maneuvers than minor or more advanced maneuvers than moderate. You should always note what your martial arts rating is when you take a new style feat.

For example, Gurven Stoneye is a 1st-level dwarven fighter. He selects the Improved Bull Rush feat as his bonus fighter class feat, and the Hammer Style feat as his starting character feat. He immediately gets to choose a minor hammer style maneuver, and selects Guarded Charge. He also notes his starting martial art rating for hammer style is 0 (since he gets to count his starting rating without including any value he gained this level). He lacks the spare skill points to buy any ranks of Profession (martial artist).

At 2nd level, Gurven selects the Combat Reflexes feat as his fighter class feat, and at 3rd level he takes the Anvil Style feat. He immediately selects a minor maneuver for anvil style (taking Anvil Shield), and notes his starting martial rating for it (2, for his +2 base attack bonus prior to this level). At 4th level, Gurven decides to buy one rank of Profession (martial artist), bring his martial arts rating to 5 (+4 base attack bonus, +1 rank). Since that's 5 more than his starting rating for hammer style, he immediately gets to pick another maneuver for that style (and selects Sudden Charge). He won't get another anvil style maneuver until his martial art rating is 7 (5 more than his starting anvil style

martial art rating of 2).

This system is designed to reward a character for taking a martial art style early, both by including his base attack bonus (which goes up automatically as he gains levels), and by limiting additional maneuver picks to 5 martial arts rating points earned *after* having a style feat. While a 9th-level rogue could take a martial style feat and decide to buy 8 ranks in Profession (martial artist) in a single level to gain a higher martial art rating, he would gain no benefit from the 8 levels of base attack bonus he earned prior to taking the feat.

Dwarven Battlecraft

Dwarves have a strong martial tradition, focusing on combat with larger species, fighting underground, and using their natural stability offensively. Nearly all dwarven battlecraft styles are centered on weapons, armor or tools of some kind. Dwarves are proud of their weapons of war, and often wear them to formal occasions as well as combat situations. As a result they have no need to develop weaponless fighting styles, instead focusing on elements of their war kit that complement their natural abilities the best.

Dwarven Style Feats	Style Prerequisites
Anvil Style	Combat Reflexes, racial stability feature.
Hammer Style	Improved Bull Rush, racial ability to move at normal speed in heavy armor.

Anvil Style

Dwarves are simply more stable than other races, and many learn to use that stability to become rocks of defense upon which enemy attacks break. Students of anvil style strive to be immobile, hardy, and fearless. They are often overrun, forcing them to be self-sufficient. But they also learn to be thorns in a foe's side even when alone, helping them to break up an enemy attack like living breakwaters.

Minor Maneuvers

Anvil Shield: Students of the anvil style battlecraft must learn to take extra efforts to defend themselves from enemy attacks, as their fighting style often isolates them from allies. Lacking the nimble movement of many other races, anvil students do this with careful shieldwork rather than evasive maneuvering.

Whenever you fight defensively or take the full defense action, and you are using a shield, you double the normal bonus to AC granted by the maneuver.

Blockmaster: Some anvil students set defense before offense, assisting their allies by soaking up enemy attacks rather than attacking foes directly. To help survive such tactics, these students learn to fight with two shields (often as a stepping stone to the shieldfighter maneuver).

You may use two shields at once (one in each hand), gaining the full AC benefit (including magical bonuses) from each.

Ingot: When fighting in tunnels, dwarven warriors often find themselves swarmed by dire rats, kobolds or other vermin while fighting in tight spaces. They learn to use the constricted terrain to their advantage, allowing a wall or chasm to guard their back while they focus on eliminating their foes.

If at least one square adjacent to you is impassible to a foe (a wall, a pit, or some other terrain that your foe cannot move into), that foe cannot flank you.

Mountain: Though dwarves are naturally sturdy, they can learn to be even more difficult to knock down or move. On any roll you are allowed to add your racial +4 stability bonus, you may also add your base attack bonus.

Moderate Maneuvers

Forgeflame: Dwarves often face foes faster than themselves, leaving their formations vulnerable to being overrun. Masters of anvil style battlecraft learn to slow the advance of enemy forces by settling into an area and lashing out to harass all who come near, forcing foes to move with greater caution.

As a move action, you can harass any foes within your threatened area. Enemies must treat the spaces you threaten as difficult terrain, spending ten feet of movement for every five feet they move through the area.

Shieldfighter: Anvil style warriors almost always arm themselves with one or two shields, making them much more resilient foes. As they become increasingly comfortable carrying a shield, many of these warriors learn it can be used offensively as well.

When you are using a shield, you may make an attack with it as if it were a martial weapon without losing its AC bonus. The damage dealt is 1d4 + your Strength modifier.

Tongs: A common answer to the difficulty of overcoming an anvil-style dwarven warrior is to charge him in an effort to deal massive damage to the slow-moving foe. The anvil style battlecraft answers this practice with a surprising counterattack, having the dwarf take one step towards a foe to preempt a charge and possibly kill a foe before the charge lands a blow.

As a standard action, you can set yourself against charge attacks. For the next round, any creature that charges you provokes an attack of opportunity when it enters a space you threaten, and you deal double damage on a successful strike. If you have a weapon that already deals increases damage against a charge, increase its damage by one multiple.

Advanced Maneuvers

Shattered Hammer: The pinnacle of anvil battlecraft is to be so resilient that foes break their weapons against you, as a sword breaks when smashed against the anvil.

Any time a foe makes a melee attack against you that hits your touch AC, but fails to penetrate your full AC, you may immediately make a sunder attack against the weapon used as a free action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity. If the attack was made unarmed or with a natural weapon (such as claws), you instead get a normal attack of opportunity against that foe.

Tempered: Masters of anvil battlecraft spend hours allowing themselves to be stuck, to better prepare themselves for the pain and to train their bodies not to flinch. After years of such practice, some blows simply harm the master less.

You gain DR equal to your Constitution modifier against bludgeoning and constriction damage.

Hammer Style

Prerequisites: Improved Bull Rush, racial ability to move at normal speed in heavy armor.

No matter how heavily armored a dwarf is, he can maintain the same speed. While many dwarves use this to their advantage when maneuvering in combat, students of the hammer style make it the focus of their combat maneuvers. They become fast-moving juggernauts of heavy armor, charging about the battlefield to smash through enemy formations and punch their way to important targets such as siege engines and enemy commanders.

Minor Maneuvers

Guarded Charge: Often a hammer student must travel quite a distance across a battle field before reaching a valuable target. The style teaches them to run at full speed while guarding themselves from potential attacks.

You may take a full defense action and a double move as a full-round action.

Skilled Charge: The charge is the preferred maneuver of the student of hammer style battlecraft. It allows the dwarf to move further than more cautious foes and still attack an enemy. As students practice charging hour after hour, they learn to leave themselves less vulnerable even while running headlong into combat.

When you charge on foot (not mounted), you do not take the normal -2 penalty to AC.

Sudden Charge: The hammer style teaches dwarves to burst into action immediately, building up speed with a single explosive action.

You can charge with no minimum movement (rather than the 10 feet normally required).

Smash: Hammer battlecraft students learn to trust their armor to keep them from harm, allowing them to hurl themselves against objects with abandon, breaking items with ease.

If you charge into an object (including doors and walls), you may add your armor bonus and shield bonus to a Strength check to attempt to break it.

Moderate Maneuvers

Burst Free: A hammer style warriors learns to call upon a sudden burst of speed to wrench himself lose from a foe that has him grabbed or held.

When grappled, you may make a martial art rating check (1d20 + martial art rating) to break free of the grapple. If you succeed, you must take a move action directly away from your foe, even if this provokes an attack of opportunity.

Improved Charge: A hammer style warrior maintains his momentum for a charge even when avoiding allies or moving uphill.

When charging, you may make up to two turns of as much as 90 degrees each. You may charge through friendly squares and uphill, though not through any other difficult terrain.

Prerequisite: Sudden Charges

Devastating Charge: The hammer fighting style teaches dwarves to use their momentum to deal additional damage with them slam into a foe.

If you charge a foe, you deal +2d6 damage with a successful attack.

Advanced Maneuver

Advanced Charge: A master of hammer battlecraft can charge under almost any circumstances.

You can charge any time you can move, even if you are moving through terrain that slows your move rate. Any movement you take as part of a charge does not provoke attacks of opportunity.

Prerequisite: Improved Charge

Avalanche: A master of hammer battlecraft knows how to slam into a foe in a way that is both damaging and effective at relocating that foe.

You can charge into a foe and use your armored body to damage him, while simultaneously pushing him backwards. When you make a Bull Rush, you also make a normal melee attack roll. (This is considered a charge.) If your attack roll succeeds, you deal melee damage. The damage is 1d3 if you are unarmored, 1d4 if in light armor, 1d6 in medium

armor, and 1d8 in heavy armor. You add 150% of your Strength bonus to this damage.

The Monster of the Okanagan

for *GURPS & d20 System*

by Bevan Thomas

I'm looking for the Ogopogo,
Its mother was a mutton,
Its father was a whale,
I'm going to put a little bit of salt on its tail.
--Bill Brimblecomb

It is said that a strange beast lives deep beneath the Okanagan, a large lake found in the interior of the Canadian province of British Columbia. Some say it is a man cursed by the gods to become a monster, others claim that it is a shy, almost gentle creature that wishes only to be left alone. Whatever its nature, the lake beast is large, mighty, and very, very good at keeping itself hidden.

This creature is known as either Naitaka or Ogopogo, and these two names represent the dual-nature of the lake monster's mythology. The monster has long be known to the Okanakane people, who see the creature as a water demon, a warrior cursed by the gods to take serpent form and prowl the cold waters forever. However, the Europeans who settled in the Okanagan began to tell of a very different lake monster, one not shaped by tribal mythology, but by the hopes of cryptozoologists and tourists alike. Their version of the creature was a beast, not a cursed and evil human, a thing that was shy, placid, and sometimes even friendly. They even gave the creature a new name, one derived from a parody of a British musical hall tune, and thus did Naitaka ("Lake Demon") become Ogopogo.

This article presents both versions of the monster, the cruelly vindictive Naitaka and the shy and placid Ogopogo, and includes stats of them for both *GURPS* Fourth Edition and *d20 System.* The GM may adopt any one of these interpretations, depending upon which would be most appropriate for his campaign.

In all traditional versions of the story, the creature is confined to Lake Okanagan. However, the GM is free to transport it to another large, deep lake if that would be more appropriate (such as one in a separate fantasy world). The creature's stats can also be used to represent similar water monsters (such as the Loch Ness Monster, Cadborosaurus, or a large and potent sea serpent).

Naitaka   *315 points*

Age: Indeterminate; 50'. Naitaka is a long, dark green serpent similar in appearance to a rattlesnake. However, it has no rattle on its tail, and its head resembles that of an earless horse with a seaweed-like mane and a mouth full of sharp teeth. Its eyes are red and glow with malice.

Attributes: ST 40 (no fine manipulators 40%) [180]; DX 15 (no fine manipulators 40%) [60]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 12 [20].

Secondary Characteristics: SM +6; Dmg 4d+1/7d-1; BL 320 lbs.; HP 40 [0]; Will 13 [10]; Per 14 [15]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6.75 [0]; Basic Move 7 [5].

Advantages: Amphibious [10]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Constriction Attack [15], DR 6 (tough skin, -40%) [18]; Deep Sleeper [1]; Discriminatory Smell [15], Doesn't Breath (Gills) [10]; Enhanced Move 2 (Water Speed 28) [40]; Hard to Kill 3 [6]; Medium [10]; Metabolism Control 10 (Hibernation, automatically enter when exposed to extreme cold) [20]; Nictitating Membrane 2 [2]; Pressure Support 2 [10]; Subsonic Hearing [5], Teeth (sharp) [1]; Unaging [15]; Vibration Sense (water) [10]

Disadvantages: Bad Temper (9) [-15]; Bestial [-15]; Blood Lust (9) [-15]; Callous [-5]; Cannot Speak [-15]; Dead Broke [-25]; Divine Curse (cannot leave Lake Okanagan) [-20]; Frightens Animals [-10]; Gluttony (12) [-5]; Intolerance (humanity) [-5]; Loner (12) [-5]; Odious Personal Habits (eats sapients) [-15]; Reputation 3 (water demon to those around Lake Okanagan, recognized all the time) [-7]; Restricted Diet (fresh meat) [-10]; Sleepy (asleep 7/8th of the time)[-26]; Social Stigma (monster) [-15]; Vermiform [-35]

Languages: Okanakane (native) [0]

Skills: Area Knowledge (the Okanagan)-12 [2]; Boating-14 [1]; Bow-15 [2]; Brawling-15 [1], Camouflage-11 [1], Fishing-15 [2], Intimidation-14 [2]*, Knife-16 [2], Occultism-11 [2], Spear-14 [1], Stealth-16 [4], Survival (freshwater lakes)-14 [2], Survival (woodlands)-13 [1], Wrestling-16 [4]
*+1 from Callous

Biography

Many hundreds of years ago, there was a man among the Okanakan people who spoke with demons. This bizarre behavior made him an outcast, shunned by others of its tribe. One day, the demons drove the man into a wild frenzy, and on the shores of the Lake Okanagan, he murdered Kan-It-Kan, a wise tribal elder.

For this, the gods struck him down. They transformed the man into a huge monster and then cast him into the lake, cursed forever to haunt the scene of its crime. It had become Naitaka, the "Lake Demon."

Motivations

When awake, only two things matter to Naitaka: eating and gaining revenge on humanity. It seeks to accommodate both of these by devouring anyone foolish enough to be on or by the lake.

Encountered

Naitaka spends most of the time asleep in the middle of the lake in a cave underneath Rattlesnake Island. Sometimes, when a storm rages over the lake, the monster rises to the surface, its undulating form churning the waters so much that huge waves crash against the shore.

The monster drags its prey down to its cave, where it feasts on the poor souls. A few days later, bits of flesh, cloth, and other remnants of the victim wash up on Squally Point, the shore across from Rattlesnake Island.

Ogopogo   *283 points*

Age: Indeterminate; 50'. Ogopogo looks like Naitaka for the most part, though its countenance lacks any intelligence. It is nothing but a shy, inoffensive animal.

Attributes: ST 40 (no fine manipulators 40%) [180]; DX 15 (no fine manipulators 40%) [60]; IQ 6 [-80]; HT 12 [20].

Secondary Characteristics: SM +6; Dmg 4d+1/7d-1; BL 320 lbs.; HP 40 [0]; Will 8 [10]; Per 13 [35]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6.75 [0]; Basic Move 7 [5].

Advantages: Amphibious [10]; Constriction Attack [15], DR 6 (tough skin, -40%) [18]; Deep Sleeper [1]; Discriminatory Smell [15], Doesn't Breath (Gills) [10]; Enhanced Move 2 (Water Speed 28) [40]; Metabolism Control 10 (Hibernation, automatically enter when exposed to extreme cold) [20]; Nictitating Membrane 2 [2]; Pressure Support 2 [10]; Reputation +2 (beloved mascot to those around Lake Okanagan, recognized all the time) [5]; Subsonic Hearing [5], Teeth (sharp) [1]; Unaging [15]; Vibration Sense (water) [10]

Disadvantages: Dead Broke [-25]; Gluttony (12) [-5]; Loner (12) [-5]; Shyness (crippling) [-20]; Sleepy (asleep 7/8th

of the time)[-26]; Vermiform [-35]; Wild Animal [-30]

Skills: Area Knowledge (the Okanagan)-7 [2]; Brawling-15 [1], Stealth-16 [4], Survival (freshwater lakes)-13 [2], Wrestling-14 [1]

Biography

Very little is known about Ogopogo's past. Some say the creature has always lived alone in Lake Okanagan, others claim that there was originally a fellow, but the others died off. Its past is one of the many mysteries that surround the creature.

Motivations

Ogopogo is an animal with normal animal desires, though as it seems be a unique creature, it perhaps lacks a desire to reproduce. It fees off fish, plants, and other food that it can find in the lake.

Encountered

The creature spends most of its time asleep, and even when awake it does its best to avoid human contact. It prefers to avoid conflict, but if forced, can deliver a nasty bite. Ogopogo despises the taste of human flesh, and instinctually knows that if it draws too much attention to itself, the tranquility it enjoys will be forever destroyed.

d20 System Statistics

The following are rules for including Naitaka or Ogopogo in a d20 campaign. Ogopogo is identical to Naitaka save for the lack of intelligence and lack of barbarian levels.

Naitaka

Gargantuan Magical Beast (Aquatic)
Hit Dice: 12d10+84 + 5d12+35 (240 hp)
Initiative: +2
Speed: 40 ft. (8 squares), swim 80 ft.
Armor Class: 28 (-4 size, +2 Dex, +20 natural), touch 8, flat-footed 28
Base Attack/Grapple: +17/+45
Attack: Bite +27 melee (2d8+21)
Full Attack: Bite +27 melee (2d8+21)
Space/Reach: 20 ft./15 ft.
Special Attacks: Constrict 2d6+14, improved grab, rage 2/day, swallow whole
Special Qualities: Amphibious, blindsight 120 ft., dark vision 60', improved uncanny dodge, keen scent, low-light vision, trap sense +1
Saves: Fort +19, Ref +11, Will +7
Abilities: Str 38, Dex 15, Con 25, Int 11, Wis 14, Cha 10
Skills: Hide +3, Intimidate +7, Listen +9, Knowledge (the planes) +3, Move Silently +10, Spot +9, Survival +7, Swim +27
Feats: Alertness, Awesome Blow, Improved Bull Rush, Power Attack, Snatch, Stealthy
Environment: Temperate aquatic
Treasure: Double Standard
Alignment: Chaotic Evil
Challenge Rating: 20

Before being cursed, the creature was a 5th-level barbarian and still retains the class features, skills, and other

elements of its former life. It speaks Abyssal and Common. The monster keeps its prey's possessions as grim trophies, and over the years has accumulated a decent treasure trove.

Combat

Naitaka prefers to ambush its foes, its coils causing the water to seethe as it strikes out at its prey and drags the poor creatures down to the depths. It will almost always enter its barbarian rage before attacking.

Blindsight (Ex): Naitaka can "see" creatures and objects within 120 feet by sensing vibrations. This ability only works when Naitaka is underwater.

Constrict (Ex): On a successful grapple check, Naitaka deals 2d6+14 points of damage.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, Naitaka 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 either swallow the foe the following round or constrict.

Improved Uncanny Dodge (Ex): Naitaka possesses a danger-sense that allows him to retain its Dexterity bonus to AC even if it is caught flat-footed or attacked by an invisible opponent. It also cannot be flanked.

Keen Scent (Ex): Naitaka can notice creatures by scene in a 180-foot radius and detect blood in the water at ranges of up to a mile.

Rage (Ex): Naitaka may fly into a barbarian rage twice a day.

Swallow Whole (Ex): Naitaka can attempt to swallow a grappled opponent of a smaller size than itself by making a successful grapple check. Once inside, the opponent takes 2d8+21 points of crushing damage plus 8 points of poison damage per round from Naitaka's insides. A swallowed creature can cut its way out by using a light slashing or piercing weapon to deal 25 points of damage to the gizzard (AC 20). Once the creature exits, muscular action closes the hole; another swallowed victim must cut its own way out. Naitaka can hold 2 Large, 8 Medium, 32 Small, 128 Tiny, or 512 Diminutive or smaller opponents.

Skills: Naitaka has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

Ogopogo

Gargantuan Magical Beast (Aquatic)
Hit Dice: 12d10+84 (175 hp)
Initiative: +2
Speed: 40 ft. (8 squares), swim 80 ft.
Armor Class: 28 (-4 size, +2 Dex, +20 natural), touch 8, flat-footed 26
Base Attack/Grapple: +12/+40
Attack: Bite +22 melee (2d8+21)
Full Attack: Bite +22 melee (2d8+21)
Space/Reach: 20 ft./15 ft.
Special Attacks: Constrict 2d6+14, improved grab, swallow whole
Special Qualities: Amphibious, blindsight 120 ft., dark vision 60', keen scent, low-light vision
Saves: Fort +15, Ref +10, Will +6
Abilities: Str 38, Dex 15, Con 25, Int 4, Wis 14, Cha 10
Skills: Hide -5, Listen +7, Move Silently +7, Spot +7, Swim +25
Feats: Alertness, Improved Bull Rush, Power Attack, Snatch, Stealthy
Environment: Temperate aquatic

Treasure: None
Alignment: Neutral
Challenge Rating: 15

Ogopogo understands some words in Common, though it cannot speak any language.

Combat

The creature is incredibly shy, and avoids combat if at all possible. If forced, Ogopogo generally prefers to wrap its coils around the enemy, dragging the creature down beneath the water as Ogopogo constricts it.

Skills: Ogopogo has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

Further Reading

- Bertin, Johanna. *Strange Events*
- Smith, Barbara. *Ghost Stories and Mysterious Creatures of British Columbia*
- [Ogopogo at Wikipedia](#)

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

A Multiple-Choice Question With Ten Billion Options

Almost everyone likes choices; the ability to have a myriad of options for most aspects of life is one of the hallmarks of our modern industrial age. We can choose from dozens of types of cars or sodas, and an ice cream parlor with fewer than 20 different flavors is something to turn your nose up at. And, speaking in broad generalizations, almost everyone says they like *more* choices. There are very few items where you can't get majority agreement to the question, "Do you believe consumers should be permitted more options for X?"

However, those who study social phenomenon -- such as economists, psychologists, and bloggers -- have noted a curious tendency among folks: while almost everyone claims they like more choices, almost invariably having too many options leads to analgous results. For example, employers have found that offering too many retirement investment options often results in employees not choosing any of them . . . which is almost certainly the *worst* decision you can make in that circumstance that doesn't involve dumping all ones assets into Charlatan's Magic Beans Ltd.

If you think about, the reasons behind this are simple. Let's say you have two investment options. Well, you can compare those items side by side and mentally calculate which one is better for your needs; any differences can be compared directly to the other. Now, let's add two more. Suddenly the number of comparisons that need to be done balloons; unless one specific option immediately and decisively presents itself, it's much more likely that the decision will be put off. "Oh, I'll look at them some weekend when I get a chance," goes the excuse, despite the fact that spare weekends are often as rare as loose diamonds littering the street. And if there are even *more* options . . . well, "spare weekend" transmutes to "month of Sundays."

Likewise the existence of additional choices can lead to even *fewer* options. For example, let's say an ice cream shop offers 15 flavors. Well, that's enough for someone to spend a reasonable amount of time deliberating each one: "Let's see . . . I don't like coffee, I had strawberry last week, I'm bored of chocolate . . . Okay; how about rum ripple?" Now, let's pretend the same ice cream shop offers 10,000 choices (for example, e-yummy-yummy-ice-cream.com's extensive selection). Well, that's more options than can ever be sort out one at a time. So, how would you select a flavor? Well, the two most obvious methods would be to select the one you always select, or to use an alternate means of sifting down the options. The former method narrows those 10,000 choices down to one, and the latter method depends on the alternate means used. For example, one obvious choice would be to choose one of the most popular flavors . . . only now, you're relying on people who quite probably used the pick-their-favorite method, *and* the list you're choosing from is dependant on the sorthing mechanism; if you're looking at a "Top 10 Flavors" list, you've now ended up with five fewer options than you had at the original 15-flavor parlor!

Once you wrap your mind around the notion that "less choice can mean more freedom," the implications of this are enormous in gaming. For example, in social situations, a smart gamer would be wise not to present his friends with too many options. "Which of these five games sounds most interesting?" will almost certainly yield a more satisfying result than, "Which of my vast library of 500 games would you like to play?"

Within a game it's a similar phenomenon. I realize that I've generally had much less luck as a GM in campaigns where the players are given near-infinite freedom -- say, in the form of a ship, 40 days of provisions, and a map of the Known World -- than if I restrict those options: "The noble prince appreciates you answering his summons. 'Here are the three most pressing problems we face,' he says. 'We would be honored if you could tackle any single one of them . . .'"

Finally, in game rules themselves it can be fruitful to restrict freedom. As both a player and a GM instructing new players, one of the problems I've had with games that are too open-ended -- such as ***Champions, GURPS,*** or ***FUDGE*** -- is that it can be difficult to come up with a concept. These game systemns can be worse than a blank canvas; they're like an art supply house of blank canvases, unetched copper sheets, and slabs of butter waiting to be sculpted. I can generally whip up a character much faster in a system such as the old ***DC Heroes,*** where flipping through a list of evokatively named powers will usually elicit an idea or two. And while they're reviled by many players, the "splat" technique of many games -- where various factions and groups have their own stereotypes and powers -- can be a

remarkably fast way of reducing what could be a complex game world into an approachable menu of options.

Although I respect the freedom that the modern iteration of the **d20 System** offers in character creation, I confess a real fondness for the old basic **Dungeons & Dragons** game. You remember: The one where races and classes were one and the same ("You're an Elf? You must have received the same magic training as the rest of your species!") and where the most complex choice a beginning player would have was whether the Magic User wanted his one spell to be *magic missile,* or whether he wanted to die in one swipe from an enraged unwounded bugbear. (These two options aren't mutually exclusive.) With every version of **Dungeons & Dragons** prior to the recent one, it was possible to choose a class and generate a character in five minutes or less, and the number of choices -- and combination of choices -- was probably less than 10.

Now, I'm not saying that having a huge number of choics is always bad . . . not at all. I love being able to use, say, **GURPS** to generate *exactly* the character I want. And if I know I'm looking for that Sugar-Free Chocolate-Chip Cookie Dough Coffee Sorbet, I'm glad if it's one of the 10,000 choices. But it's also possible for too many choices to result in *fewer* options and, worse, may end up with gaming not happening at all.

And that's often the worst possible choice.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Thurn and Taxis

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Written by Karen & Andreas Seyfarth

Full-color boxed game (two to four players) with map, 80 wooden houses in four colors, four company cards, 20 coach cards, 66 city cards, 30 point tiles, four rules summary cards, rulebook; $32.95

Thurn and Taxis has its origins in the 15th century when the Kaiser commissioned someone to carry his correspondence across the Holy Roman Empire -- his own little Pony Express, of a sort. By the time you get to take a hand in matters, it's two centuries later and you have a family reputation to uphold as the government asks you to formalize the postal system.

The object of the game is to produce the most successful (read: high-scoring) mail-carrying service in Austria and surrounding lands.

Each player plays a descendant of this famous, favored family. Two to four heirs get their own company to create a postal service that runs through as many cities as possible. The map shows the towns you'll cater to, from Freiburg in the west to Linz in the east, and the roads that interconnect them. A deck of city cards shows the urban centers, and these are the currency on which the game runs.

Eight of these cards are set face-up on the side of the map. On his turn, an entrepreneur must draw at least one city card, either one of the revealed cards or taking his chances with a blind draw if none of those appeal to him. Then he has to play at least one city card from his hand onto the table in front of him. Players may also call upon the services of a postal official each turn, who allow them to break rules like drawing or playing extra cards. The row of cards grows by at least one city each turn. If you want to lay down a city card, it has to go on the left- or rightmost end of the chain and it must connect to that burg. For example, if you played Innsbruck, you can only play a card for an adjacent city -- say, Zurich -- next to it. The next card you place has to be either another city on the other side of Innsbruck or a town that abuts Zurich.

With three or more cities, you can choose to close out the route. You may now place houses on the towns you connected. Either play one house on every city on that route within a single province, or place one house per province on any one city you linked during that line. It's not as confusing in play as it sounds, but it's a vital strategic decision because there are several ways to score.

You get points for being the first one to have a house in every province, but you also score for having one post on every town in a single province. If you're the first to reach one of these milestones, you receive a point counter. The next person's counter is worth less, so "firstest with the mostest" is good. You get points depending on how long your route is, and longer links lead to better coaches (really they're just worth more points). You can't simply skip to the big guns; you have to work your way up the ladder of success one carriage improvement at a time.

The game goes to a final round if someone places their last house on the board or manages to get the coveted "7" coach. There aren't enough houses to fill all the cities, but by the end the towns you haven't built on are scattered. They aren't lined up like ducks, waiting for you to build one more perfect route, so you'll probably have houses left over. Your carriage and point counters increase your score, while the remaining houses in your stock subtract from it. The high score wins the game.

If you've never cracked open a Rio Grande game, you're in for a component treat. If you *have* played one, the pieces will have you nodding in appreciation. The cards may be one stock size too fragile (especially given that they have to be shuffled a lot throughout play), and the wooden houses are an odd shape that can fall over easily, but it's all beautifully illustrated. The map portrait is a particular treat.

The box bottom low-balls the time estimate; they claim it's playable in under an hour, but the reality is a full crew will probably take a couple of hours even after you're used to the rules. It's an enjoyable two hours, though, so take heart. And while it's not impossible to interfere with the progress others are making, there are times your bones ache with the desire to really derail your opponents' plans. Doing so takes too much subtlety to be a major element of play.

But while there are some old-hat mechanics here, the execution is such you won't notice it in play. There's plenty to do, lots of scoring to keep you occupied, and best of all there's a selection of strategies. You and your competitors ultimately end up with much the same layout, but how you choose to get there is of overall importance. Tension mounts just watching new cards being placed on the map, and it can be painful if someone opts to use the bailiff's influence to reset the face-up card choices. There goes that Regensburg card you were waiting to see . . .

The rules are pleasing to use, with a fulfilling flow that means not rain nor sleet nor snow nor dead of night shall stay your friends from swiftly congregating for another round of ***Thurn and Taxis.***

--Andy Vetromile

Building the Low-Tech Landscape

Part 2: Overlords and Cities
for *GURPS*

by Matt Riggsby

Having dealt with the peasants, it's time to start looking up the ladder to consider the relationship between peasants and the people and institutions who employ and rule them and with the centers of civilization they support.

Tax Revenues and Sharecropping

There are a few different ways peasant produce made its way up the ladder. One approach is to regard taxes as a fraction of the peasant's income. This approach is suitable for relatively free or wealthy peasants. Even free peasants could be taxed up to a third of their total income. That's the *total* tax burden. Not all of it goes to political overlords; a significant amount of money often goes to religious institutions. In many societies, from Mesopotamia to Ancient Greece to Medieval China and Europe, churches and temples were major recipients of worldly goods. In other words, their might be two groups collecting taxes; whether they get an equal share or if one gets more than the other is up to the GM.

With the taxation approach, assume taxes are included in a household's cost of living rather than an additional expense. Households which are Struggling or better can be taxed at up to 30%. However, Poor households can't pay more than 10% of their cost of living in taxes. They simply can't afford to pay more than that.

In various times and places, though, many peasants were what we'd call tenant farmers or sharecroppers, working a plot of someone else's land in return for a small portion of the crops. From a modern point of view, the distinction might be between running one's own farm versus working as an employee on someone else's, although this does start to get into the complex issue of property rights.

One way to treat this is to have the sharecropper take an appropriate level of income for himself and paying some level of taxes based on that, but assume that he actually produces as much income (and uses as much land) as someone at a higher level of wealth, with the excess going to an overlord. A sharecropper will almost always be Poor, so at TL3, that suggests that each sharecropper nets his lord about $200 per month. However, it's fairly clear that peasants working directly for their own benefit are *much* more diligent and efficient than peasants working for someone else and an overlord gets far less income per acre. It would not be at all unreasonable to rule that the landlord gets only *half* of the difference between income levels, or even less. At TL3, an overlord with Poor tenants would probably get only $100 per tenant, along with some more conventional taxation. Clearly, sharecropping is a much better deal for the ruler than for the individual peasant, but not nearly as good for the economy as a whole. A sharecropper may end up paying taxes as well, though given his poverty, he probably won't be paying much.

In historical texts, this sort of peasant could have gone by a number of names: villain, servus, serf. However, not all serfs are sharecroppers and not all sharecroppers are serfs. The term "serf" implies a relationship as much political as it is economic. A serf is tied to the land, obligated to work it and prohibited from leaving it behind without permission from his overlord. In most cases, serfs were also very poor; those who could become wealthier would often buy their way out of their obligations. However, in some periods, as serfdom became rarer, those who did hang on to old feudal ties might have a closer relationship with the manor than their "free" neighbors, which could easily mean superior access to the political system and economic resources. Moreover, sharecroppers could just as easily be wage labor, employed for a season or a few years until they get their own land rather than permanent subjects. Sharecroppers can be free, even if it only means being free to starve.

In actual practice, some peasants may work only their own land and others will be pure sharecroppers, but many will be somewhere in between, combining relatively free holdings with labor on someone else's fields. To handle this, the GM may want to introduce fractional wealth levels, discussed below. A sharecropper will probably be Poor, Struggling-2, or Struggling-1, and will net their overlord an amount equal to half the difference between his monthly income and that for a character no more than one full level of wealth higher.

Of course, sharecroppers don't have to work for noblemen. This same arrangement can be used to handle people working for wealthier but still common land owners. Given the limited amount of land a single family could farm, someone with a lot of land and not enough hands would have to bring in additional labor. Running the numbers in the previous article, it should become clear that it would be difficult for a single peasant household to rise much above Struggling wealth. However, in various times and places, there was a small rural middle class, below the titled nobility (and without their political clout and military obligations) but above the poorest dirt farmers. A farmer by himself might produce enough wealth to be Struggling, but with a few hirelings, their additional production could easily boost him to Average wealth.

Sharecroppers can likewise work for institutions. Temples and monasteries across the Old World received bequests of land from people hoping to curry divine favor. Sometimes, the land came with peasants who would pay the temple either with taxes or as sharecroppers. Other times, though, lower-class monks and other minor church members would be the ones working the land, receiving very little of their own produce and supporting their brethren.

This could create a complex picture for taxation. The poor hireling might produce a sizable amount of income for his employer, generate tax income for his overlord, and provide support for a nearby church or temple.

Forms of Taxation

Income makes its way from the peasants to overlords in many different forms. First, there are payments in kind, a share of whatever crops, livestock, or other products are raised: sacks of grain, bushels of fruits and vegetables, cheeses, wool, and so on. In most periods, the overwhelming majority of direct taxes are payments in kind. They're relatively easy to obtain, and while it will take a few steps to convert a storehouse full of wheat into a sword or a horse, they'll keep the landlord fed.

Second, there are rents, fees, and other payments to be made in money. Typical fees include charges for using the village mill, payment for permission to marry or to plow fields, fees for rendering criminal judgments and settling local disputes, or surcharges for growing particular kinds of crops. Monetary payments are extremely useful, since they provide maximum liquidity, but peasants can't provide a lot of it in most periods.

Third, peasants often owe labor services, which may or may not be specific (some peasants might be required to, say, thresh grain for four days in October, while others might be subject to one day a week of doing whatever their lord commands). Nobles and governments tend to be major landowners, and in addition to growing their own crops, peasants may be required to spend a certain amount of time working in their lord's fields. This gives the landlord certain advantages. Because the potential productivity and pool of available labor vastly outstrips what he needs for bare subsistence, he can afford to grow certain kinds of valuable crops that a peasant couldn't. For example, a peasant couldn't live off of a harvest of grapes, nor can he wait for several years for vines to start producing. A lord, however, can grow enough grain to ensure that he has more than enough to eat and have more than enough land and labor left over to cultivate high-value and labor-intensive crops.

Complicating the picture even more is the existence of forced loans and forced sales. An indirect means of taxation used by many governments was to require people to sell certain goods at specified prices, typically well below market value. In practical terms, this can probably be regarded as a less efficient means of getting taxes in money or in kind, but ultimately with the same economic effects as a direct tax.

It's certainly easier to treat tax and sharecropping income abstractly, assuming that the overlord can convert whatever income he has into whatever form he needs it in. However, GMs eager for detail can break taxes and sharecropping income down into the categories of kind, money, and labor, which the overlord can then use as he sees fit. The value of income in kind can be applied directly against the overlord's cost of living, just as peasant farmer income. Income in the form of labor is typically used for farming, which means that it's really income in kind. However, an overlord could use it instead for unskilled non-agricultural labor, such as digging moats or irrigation trenches or building roads (some of it could be used to build fortifications, mills, and the like, but most of that labor requires significant skills). An overlord might even be

allowed to use income in labor to raise levies of troops, although most peasants will be unskilled and deeply unenthusiastic fighters. No more than 1% of a Poor peasant's taxes can be taken in money, and no more than 20% of taxes from Struggling or Average farmers.

Historically, taxes and rents were expressed in specific fixed amounts: a bushel of barley, a week of plowing, three pieces of silver, and so on. The percentages presented here are a summary for the convenience of modern gamers, not calculations ever performed by anyone levying or paying them. In the short term, the fixed amounts meant stability and ease of computation for everyone, and since inflation was extremely low by modern standards, the value of taxes and tribute stayed at a stable level for the authorities. It was also a boon to a largely illiterate and innumerate society not to have to compute and document a twelfth of the oats, a seventeenth of the year's cheese production, and the like after every harvest.

Still, even though tax amounts were theoretically fixed, there was, in practice, some variability. From the peasant's point of view, there were still ways to play the system. If one was obligated to give his lord, say, a cheese of a certain size or a sheep, it didn't have to be his best cheese or his best sheep. He could rid himself of goods of slightly inferior quality, if that was possible. There was also room for self-improvement. If a peasant managed to be more productive one year than in the previous one, his taxes wouldn't increase. Regardless of how much he produced, he'd owe his lord the same amount (though he would take on new obligations if he acquired new land). If the weather was good and he had a bumper crop, so much the better for him.

For landlords, though, it could become a problem if economies changed. Improving economies (which increased the importance of money over goods) and changing technology (which changed the relative value agricultural produce) meant that those fixed taxes could become worth less and less to the lords who collected them. Over a lifetime, the effect was small, but over centuries, it became considerable. The average production of peasants might increase, but the proportion of that taken in by landlords as well of the value of that portion would drop. At higher TLs, the landlords who remained wealthy through such changes were those who controlled large areas directly and employed workers rather than relying on traditional taxation, particularly the ones who focused on what were relatively luxury trades like stock raising and wine production.

outlandish batch of unproven ideas. They still, in most societies (certainly all of western Europe), retain rights, owing their lord a limited list of duties. Anything beyond that, so far as the peasants are concerned, is money out of their purses, bread out of their mouths, or time away from their friends. Even if a lord can intimidate his peasants into extra work, the peasants can effectively retaliate in the same ways disgruntled workers always have: strikes, slowdowns, sick-outs, and intentionally doing a horrible job. The more a lord pushes his peasants, the less effective they'll be.

What a lord *can* do is to administer his domain more or less within the bounds of the system. The system is tilted in his favor, of course. He can get away with abusing his underlings to some extent, and the administration of justice can be quite bloody. However, anything that requires active cooperation of the peasantry will require more delicate handling. The GM should never forget, even if their rulers do, that peasants are still people, not counters in a game played by their rulers.

Absentee Landlords

As if the many different forms of income weren't enough, landlords were allowed a long list of rents, fees, and duties, just as modern people might pay a long, long list of fees and taxes including rent or mortgage payments, property taxes, fees for driving, fishing, hunting, and marriage licenses, sales taxes, etc. Worse for the ancient landlords, they didn't have large, powerful bureaucracies to collect them, or, often, even written laws indicating what taxes were due and when. In order to get them everything owed to them, someone had to remember what the taxes and fees were and when they were to be collected. In *GURPS* terms, this requires a lot of work and a high level of Administration skill. These are not requirements designed to attract the average aristocrat.

Any number of lords and clergy in Europe and beyond, particularly those involved in a central government or other large organization, had little or nothing to do with the lands from which they drew their income. The actual day-to-day work of administering the holding would be handed over to a local agent, whom we'll call a bailiff (though the term is Medieval, the concept isn't; Roman patricians would leave the administration of his villa's slaves to a foreman most of the time). The bailiff, usually a commoner, was the ancient equivalent of a city manager. He was a sort of professional administrator, deputized to take care of the daily operations of a fief by the duly constituted but less inclined and, often enough, less competent authorities. He wouldn't have the rights and privileges of a nobleman, but he would have authority to administer justice to the peasants he oversaw and, usually, the right to whatever additional income he could squeeze out of his jurisdiction after a fixed amount of revenue had been passed on up the ladder.

An Independent Income in a low-tech campaign would almost certainly have a bailiff lurking behind it, and it's entirely realistic for more cosmopolitan noblemen and clerics to have such an income. A number of early English students at the University of Paris were priests with sinecures, who were taking advantage of their essentially unstoppable income to leave their parishes and study for a better job. However, relying on a bailiff to administer one's holdings isn't always an independent income. Depending on the circumstances of one's employment, the authority who awarded it might be empowered and, more importantly, inclined to take it away in case of poor performance, making that income simply income from a job rather than the Independent Income advantage. The kings of Kongo, for example, used less favored noblemen to collect taxes and oversee private lands for the royal purse and redistributed those revenues to the nobility they employed. Noblemen who are Filthy Rich or better already employ such overseers and administer their administrators more than day-to-day work. Many Very Wealthy and some Wealthy characters may employ them as well.

Landlord Examples

So what might this look like in play? Let's take two rulers with very similar attributes and see how their domains might be very different. One is Patrician Ominous Omnibus, a retired senator of a wealthy republic who derives his income from a large, profitable, and picturesque villa set in a lightly rolling landscape at TL2. The other is Laird Angus McSporran, chieftain of a chilly, rainy land in the far northern highlands in TL3. Both are Status 4 and Very Wealthy.

Patrician Omnibus (an ancient legislator famed for the invention of the "Omnibus bill"), with an income of $13,500/month ($162,000/year), employs a great deal of slave labor, who count as sharecroppers. Their income is effectively Poor ($100 month or $1,200/year), but they produce at the level of being Struggling-1 ($270/month, of which Omnibus sees $85/month, or $1,020/year). Omnibus receives no "taxes" from his slaves, though they might contribute to a nearby temple. Omnibus needs 159 slaves to get enough income.

For themselves, the slaves grow mostly barley and millet (with an average yield of 850 lbs./acre) and beans (with an average yield of 450 lbs./acre). Each slave can get by with about an acre of the former and 0.8 acres of the latter. With two-field rotation, that's 3.2 acres per slave, or about 574 acres altogether. For the senator they grow wheat (at 400 lbs./acre) and tend vines (producing $15/gallon wines at 50 gallons/acre) and olive groves (producing 440 pints of oil/acre). On average, they tend 0.7 acres of wheat, 0.05 of olives, and 0.1 of vines. Including fallow land, that's 1.55 (the olive groves and vineyards don't need fallow), but since it's being tended by sharecroppers, it produces less efficiently, so that's really 3.1 acres per slave, for a total of nearly 493 acres. Ignoring possible pasturage for sheep and the use of nearby waste land for wild resources, that's around 1,065 acres. Omnibus's territory is small enough that everyone could be housed in a single large compound, probably with a luxurious country home for Omnibus on a gentle slope overlooking the fields, about eight acres of olive trees on one side, nearly 16 of grape vines on the other, and barns and less comfortable quarters for the slaves in back.

Laird McSporran is in a very different situation. McSporran is the nominal but not particularly powerful ruler of a territory of free peasants. They are, on average, Struggling, with an income of $300/month ($3,600/year). His people are more productive than Omnibus's, but McSporran sees less of it. Worse yet, despite a higher level of agricultural technology, the land and climate are much worse. McSporran, with an income of $14,000/month ($168,000/year) gets 20% of his peasants' income in taxes, requiring about 233 peasant households.

In McSporran's domain, barley comes in at 780 lbs./acre, wheat at 300 lbs./acre, oats at 400 lbs./acre, and legumes at 340 lbs./acre; olives and vines wouldn't last a week there. The average household cultivates 2.2 acres of barley, 1.5 of wheat, 1 of oats, and 2 of legumes. That's 6.7 acres under cultivation at any given time, or about 10 acres per household including fallow. Again ignoring room for animals (and McSporran's people probably keep a lot of sheep or goats), that's over 2,300 acres, well over the maximum size of a single village. The GM could easily rule that McSporran's peasants are spread out over five or six small settlements, clinging to hillsides and keeping the valley floors open for cultivation.

Shipping to the City

Now we get to figure out how many city-dwellers a countryside full of farmers can feed. Although peasant farmers consume the bulk of what they grow, the remainder is sold to other people. It is that surplus which feeds cities and towns. In general, the total value of the cost of living in a city must be equal to or less than the total value of produce provided from its agricultural hinterland (we'll assume that nutritional standards are met in the process). To figure out how many people can be supported, we must figure out how much excess is created, how far it has to travel, and how much is consumed on the way.

Wealthier farmers (and landowning noblemen definitely fall into this category) eat proportionately less of their produce and send proportionately more of it to market, where it can feed craftsmen, bureaucrats, priests, soldiers, and everyone else who doesn't make a living by tilling the soil, so the amount of excess put on the market depends on the wealth of the growers. We'll assume the following: Poor farmers sell 2% of their produce, Struggling farmers sell 20%, Average farmers sell 50%, and farmers (or, more likely, landholders) sell 75% of their produce. Sharecroppers should be counted at the level of their actual income, not the level used to calculate effective income for their landlord. A Struggling farmer produces $3,600 worth of produce a year, of which $720 can be sent to market. A Poor farmer would be able to market a mere $24 a year.

But not all of that produce will make it to the city. Transporting food for consumption elsewhere faces diminishing returns, since the people (and animals, if any) moving the goods must consume some agricultural produce in the course of shipping it. How much depends on how goods are moved and over what kind of terrain. Animal carts carrying grain and other inexpensive agricultural produce over reasonably good roads consume about 1% of the value of the produce they carry per mile (this only applies to bulk food shipping; since the cost is ultimately a function of weight or volume, shipping costs proportionately far less for goods with a high value for weight like spices and manufactured goods). Beasts of burden without carts and human bearers are less efficient (beasts because of mechanical inefficiency, humans because they'd like to be paid more than mere subsistence), in the 1.5-2% range, and a lack of roads or the presence of rough terrain can push transport costs easily as high as 4%. Water transport, however, is far more efficient. Transport by river costs half to a quarter as much as overland, while ocean transport is up to a sixteenth of the cost of overland transport.

This table lists the total value of agricultural produce which can reach an urban center per month, assuming a population density of one farm per square mile and an average production of $60 of marketable goods per month per farm (in other words, the peasants are, on average, Struggling). Although the table lists vast distances, such catchment areas are extremely unlikely. Even during the early Middle Ages, sparsely populated Britain's modest towns were hardly more than 50 or 60 miles apart (which means a catchment radius of no more than 30 miles or so), and the cities and towns of the Italian Renaissance were even closer together than that.

Marketable Goods by Area and Transport Cost

Radius	Transport Cost (as a % of value of goods shipped)									
	4%	3%	2%	1.5%	1%	.75%	.5%	.25%	.125%	.0625%
5	6,466	6,715	6,964	7,088	7,213	7,275	7,337	7,399	7,430	7,446
10	21,886	23,876	25,866	26,861	27,855	28,353	28,850	29,348	29,596	29,721
15	40,291	47,006	53,721	57,079	60,436	62,115	63,794	65,473	66,312	66,732
20	55,711	71,628	87,546	95,504	103,463	107,442	111,422	115,401	117,391	118,386
25	62,177	93,266	124,355	139,899	155,443	163,216	170,988	178,760	182,646	184,589
30		107,442	161,164	188,024	214,885	228,315	241,746	255,176	261,891	265,249
35		109,681	194,988	237,642	280,296	301,622	322,949	344,276	354,939	360,271
40			222,844	286,513	350,183	382,018	413,852	445,687	461,605	469,563
45			241,746	332,400	423,055	468,382	513,709	559,037	581,700	593,032
50			248,709	373,064	497,419	559,596	621,774	683,951	715,040	730,584
60				429,770	644,655	752,097	859,540	966,982	1,020,703	1,047,564
75					839,394	1,049,243	1,259,091	1,468,940	1,573,864	1,626,326
100					994,838	1,492,257	1,989,675	2,487,094	2,735,804	2,860,158
125						1,748,738	2,720,259	3,691,780	4,177,541	4,420,421
150							3,357,577	5,036,366	5,875,760	6,295,457
200							3,979,351	7,958,701	9,948,377	10,943,214
250								10,881,037	14,767,122	16,710,164
300								13,430,309	20,145,463	23,503,040
350								15,233,452	25,896,868	31,228,576
400								15,917,403	31,834,806	39,793,507
450									37,772,743	49,104,566
500									43,524,148	59,068,487
600									53,721,234	80,581,852
700									60,933,808	103,587,473
800									63,669,611	127,339,222
900										151,090,972

1000	174,096,593
1200	214,884,938
1400	243,735,230
1600	254,678,444

The GM must decide on the cost of transportation and the radius of the area from which the urban center can be supplied. To get the total value of agricultural produce available to an urban center, cross-index the transport cost and the radius of the catchment area and multiply by a desired average number of farms per square mile. One farm per square mile works out to about 5 people per square mile, which isn't very much.

These values can (and, in many cases, should) be adjusted for more or less productive farmers. For farmers who are on average richer or poorer, multiply the value of the produce by (average monthly value of marketable produce)/60. For example, if 90% of the farms in a region are Struggling (marketing $60/month) and 10% are Average (marketing $350/month), multiply the amount on the table by 89/60, or, if you're feeling lazy, 1.5.

The chart also presents a mathematically idealized picture which is unlikely to apply in reality. It is a best-case scenario which assumes that farmers are evenly distributed through a circular surrounding area, without variations in production or cost of transport, and send their goods directly to market in the urban center. Obviously, those assumptions won't hold any real case. Goods could easily zigzag around the countryside, and peasants and food merchants met to collect goods at village market days. Variations in the quality of land could mean patches of higher or lower production scattered unevenly around the region, and politics will ensure that the areas cities draw from will be very oddly shaped indeed, and far from the maximum the chart allows. Another very large factor is changes in ease of transport along the way. Unless farmers are very close to a city, they will, if at all possible, transport their goods to the nearest river, canal, or seaport, where they will be shipped to their final destination. This means the cost of transportation can vary wildly across the various legs of a journey. This is a very real issue, since just about every city of any size is on a river, and most very large cities are on or near the sea.

These calculations, then, should be taken as something like the speed of light. You can get arbitrarily close, but the closer you get, the harder it is to get even closer, and you'll never get there entirely. In practice, urban centers will get significantly less than is indicated here. A few rules of thumb can be adopted: The GM should feel free to come up with an approximate catchment area of a size which appears appropriate, ignoring any little bits of territory which stick out beyond the edges of a circle which covers most of the appropriate land (You *could* map out concentric circles and wedges of different levels of wealth and transportation cost in order to get a more accurate picture, but wouldn't you have more fun playing *GURPS?*). Any city with reasonably good access to a river network has an average transportation cost of about 0.5% of goods transported, while a city with reasonable access to a seacoast has a transportation cost of about 0.25% of goods transported. Very good networks of rivers and canals, favorable sea conditions, and high levels of nautical technology can push the cost even lower.

Feeding the City

One of the nigh-universal facts of history, particularly before the 20th century, is that people who live in cities are richer than people who live in the countryside and have a higher standard of living. Cities are the homes of rulers, chief religious officials, merchant princes, and the professional administrators, craftsmen, and bureaucrats who support them. Certainly, every city has its poor, but unlike the countryside where *everyone* is poor, the cities have significant concentrations of rich people who push up the average. That goes double for particularly large cities. Mid-sized towns will have Average and handful of Comfortable craftsmen and a few Wealthy and Very Wealthy clergy and rulers, but major cities will have individuals who are Filthy Rich and beyond.

On the other hand, it's clear that going up the scale of wealth, people spent proportionately less of their income on food, particularly food which could be provided by nearby farmers. High church officials and noblemen in Europe would eat bread made from wheat flour rather than gruel made from barley and millet, and most meat production was destined for their tables, but at a certain point they had to look far beyond in order to meet their needs and preferences: saltwater fish imported from seaports, imported wines, spices from faraway lands, and so on. Small towns, where demands are more likely to be met locally, will have an average cost of living in the $600-800/month range. Large cities, where a larger class of wealthy people will send abroad for their more extravagant requirements, may have an average cost of living twice as high, but local produce will need to supply only $900-1,000/month of that demand.

To get the approximate number of households the city can support, divide the total potential supply of agricultural produce by the average cost of living there. To get the total population, multiply the number of households by the average household size. Since city-dwellers are, on average, wealthier than peasants, they're likely to have larger families. Average household size in a city is probably at least six and may be as high as seven or eight.

In addition to those non-farmers, there can be some farmers still living in town. Indeed, in smaller towns, many residents will make at least some of their living from farming nearby fields. A majority of the residents of TL1 towns, or at least as many of them as can plow surrounding fields, are likely to be farmers, and smaller towns through other TLs often maintain a significant number of farmers. As cities become larger and wealthier, though, the cost of living within the walls tends to crowd farmers out.

City/Town Population Example

The town of Camford draws produce from a 10-mile radius. Most of it comes overland, but a few streams are large enough for barge travel, so the GM decides that transport costs 0.75% per mile. At a density of one farm per square mile and Struggling farmers, that's $28,353 of produce per month. The GM further decides that the area is a bit more densely populated than that, but not much. At three farms per square mile, the total produce the town can bring in is $85,059/month. At a cost of living of $600/month, the town can support about 141 households, or around 850 people at an average household size of six people.

The grand city of Venzepoli, home of wealthy merchant princes, draws produce from a small hinterland and a broad area of coastline. The GM decides that this is equivalent to an area with a 60-mile radius, although the shape doesn't look anything like a circle. It has access to the sea and sits at the end of a large river system, so the GM decides transport costs 0.25% per mile, with a density of 10 farms per square mile (again, all, on average, Struggling). That's $9,669,820 worth of produce per month. At an average cost of living of $900/month, that's 10,744 households, which translates into nearly 65,000 people.

Fractional Wealth

The wealth levels in *GURPS* are fine for putting a character in a general economic ballpark, but may be regarded as a bit coarse-grained for this kind of work. *GURPS* has character wealth increasing by factors of two or three or more, when in reality there's a broad range of levels of income. The GM may also want to allow fractional wealth levels to reflect a fuller spectrum of incomes, as detailed here:

Fractional Wealth and Status

Level	Points	Starting wealth and monthly pay multiplier
Poor	-15	1/5
Struggling -2	-14	1/3
Struggling -1	-12	2/5
Struggling	-10	1/2

Average -2	-8	2/3
Average -1	-4	3/4
Average	0	1
Average +1	4	1 1/3
Average +2	8	1 2/3
Comfortable	10	2
Comfortable +1	14	3
Comfortable +2	17	4
Wealthy	20	5
Wealthy +1	24	10
Wealthy +2	27	15
Very Wealthy	30	20
Very Wealthy +1	54	30
Very Wealthy +2	88	40
Filthy Rich	100	50

replaced by multi-story homes and apartment buildings. If the town becomes particularly wealthy, a new wall might be built encompassing a larger area, and the cycle can start again.

This is useful for dealing with small gradations both among poor peasants and other workers and among more powerful figures. The difference between a count and a baron, for example, might not be a quantum leap in income and direct holdings, but rather a slightly higher income and the allegiance of several lesser noblemen. The count might have an Ally Group, Wealth (Wealthy+1), and a few points in Independent Income where subordinates simply have Wealth (Wealthy).

If a character takes a fractional wealth level, the GM may want to impose a similar fractional Status adjustment: 2 points for Status +1/3, and 4 points for Status +2/3. Each level of fractional Status increases monthly Cost of Living by 1/3 of the amount of the difference between the higher and lower levels of Status. Status +1/3 provides a +1 Reaction bonus to people of the same Status in circumstances where Status would normally apply. Status +2/3 provides a +1 Reaction bonus to people of the same Status or a Status one lower. The difference is too subtle for people with more distant Status to discern.

Further Reading

- Braudel, Ferdinand, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*
- Bray, Francesca, *The Rice Economies*
- Chapelot, Jean and Robert Fossier, *The Village and House in the Middle Ages*
- Dube, S. C., *Indian Village*
- Duby, Georges, *Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West*
- Dyer, Christopher, *Living Standards in the Later Middle Ages*
- Greene, Kevin, *Archaeology of the Roman Economy*
- Herlihy, David, *Medieval Households*
- Russel, Josiah, *Medieval Demography*
- Wolf, Eric R., *Peasants*

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Pyramid Review

Ghosts of the Lady Grace

Published by [Carnivore Games](#)

Written by Bradford Younie

Edited by Anna Pratt

Art & maps by Alex McVey, Thomas Denmark, & Anna M. Dobritt

48-page b&w softcover; $12.95

If nothing else, Carnivore Games offers consistency from one product to the next, though that's not always a good thing. Their flagship book, ***Now Playing,*** was a quirky look at using the free-form **FUDGE** engine to turn a TV show -- any TV show -- into the setting for your next RPG. The primary setting detailed in that volume is due to have its own book soon, and to whet your appetite they're releasing ***Ghosts of the Lady Grace.***

The campaign in question is the Foundation for Paranormal Investigation, which does just as its name suggests. In this adventure, it owes more to the cable show *[Ghost Hunters](#)* than it does your *X-Files* or your Scoobies and Shaggies.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

In the first episode, the investigators are called to a seaside cottage, the Monroe Inn, to look into reports of ghosts. Supposedly when the ship called the Lady Grace hit the shoals off the coast a century ago, only three survived and were brought to the home for medical attention. Two died and one disappeared without a trace, but all three are said to walk the halls at night. Lately, though, it's as if something has sent the ghosts into fits. No longer are there simply rumors of their influence, everyone is hearing and seeing the spirits throughout the house, and it seems like the FPI might be able to get evidence of some very real occurrences.

The Monroe family isn't done surprising the researchers yet, though; they call on the team a second time. Once more the supernatural activity in the house has been stepped up, and it even seems to be affecting the people living or staying there directly -- with possibly lethal results.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The back of the book has a brief section on the ghost hunter's tools, tricks, and trappings of the trade, like electronic voice phenomenon, electromagnetic readings, and varieties of haunting. Add to this maps of the Monroe Inn and write-ups of the hotel and NPCs and that's your package.

From a production standpoint, this book is a slim but pleasing supplement. The maps are sharp and clear, and would be useful for more than one adventure (or system, or . . .). The illustrations throughout the book are simple things, but they apply the principle of "less is more." Their stark nature, more outline than picture in some cases, make them effective highlights to a book about supernatural adventure. On the other hand, the cover quickly gets that "peeling plastic" problem.

The bothersome part of the whole enterprise is how easy it is to pare down what you don't need. The maps appear within the text and again at the end of the book, so maybe you get the convenience of those references within the

adventure and not having to eliminate proprietary text when photocopying those materials for your players . . .but really, that's a couple of pages of duplicate work. The "Ghost Hunting 101" section states this information will all be in the forthcoming FPI sourcebook, so unless you desperately need that data right now you'll soon have duplicates of that, too.

The editing is too loose by half. Presumably NPC Henry is nicknamed Harry, but this is never made clear (he's just Henry in his write-up and Harry in the text). Charts are supposed to list certain items with an asterisk and instead use little descriptive conventions. Neither of these really hurts the game, but it does speak to a lack of attention to detail.

And there are good points. The adventures form their own sort of continuity and, used right, make themselves more believable as evolving elements of a larger campaign. The stories have some clever sleights of hand, and the charts and timelines littered throughout give the referee a clear idea of what happens when and where. The first episode is decent, but the second is better and gives the players a mystery (and some obstacles) to puzzle out.

Much like "The Big Dig" from the core rulebook, *Ghosts of the Lady Grace* would probably be more palatable as a PDF at the Carnivore website (not that the asking price for this one would be such a burden). Marketing may have played its part in the decision to issue the book as is, but it might be prudent to wait for the release of the setting book before committing to this kind of add-on.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Dungeon Twister

Published by [Asmodeé Editions](#)

Designed by [Christophe Boelinger](#)

Illustrated by Wayne Reynolds & Thierry Masson

Eight 5½-inch square dungeon tiles, two 11-inch starting zones, two player screens, two sets of tokens (eight characters & six objects per player) in two colors (blue & orange), two sets of character stand-ups, 16 plastic stands, two sets of 16 playing cards, open/broken markers, action tracking markers, & 16-page full color rulebook; $29.99

When it comes to dungeon games, the gamer has plenty of choice. There are card games like ***[Dungeoneer](#)*** and ***[Dungeonville,](#)*** classics like ***Dungeon!*** and Games Workshop's ***Dungeon Quest***, and even dungeons with guns, like ***[Doom: The Boardgame](#)*** and really big dungeon games like ***Doom's*** fantasy sister ***Descent.*** The very latest entry into the genre is different from all of the rest. First, it is French, being published by Asmodeé Editions; second, it is designed for two players only; and third, whole areas of the dungeon can rotate! Hence the name, ***Dungeon Twister.***

The setting for the game is Targene, a world dominated by the wealthy, powerful, and influential Arch-Mage. Some three millennia old, his boredom has lead him to build a series of labyrinths known as "Dungeon Twisters." Into these the Arch Mage teleports and pits teams of combatants, who must fight their way out, avoiding traps and learning the layout of the dungeon even as it shifts if they are to win.

Designed for two players aged 11 plus, each participant controls an identical team of eight characters who start at opposite ends of the complex. The control method is Action Point based, the number determined by a player from round to round from a limited hand of cards. Action Points are primarily employed to move, fight, and activate a character's special ability. They can also be spent to reveal a previously hidden dungeon tile and to rotate a dungeon tile. The game is easy to learn, offers plenty of tactical choice, and really can be played within 45 minutes. All that and without the use of any dice.

The game comes decently appointed with the sturdy components done in full color. Each dungeon tile depicts a five-by-five grid of squares, bounded by walls and portcullis, and marked with several pit traps, plus a single rotation gear. This is marked with an arrow, indicating the direction that the tile can be turned. It is also color coded to another tile, which allows a character to use the rotation gear of one room to twist the room it is paired with! Operating the rotation gear opens up and closes off access to other tiles, capturing the feel of a dungeon's moving blocks and secret doors working to both trap and free the characters.

Both players have the same set of tokens that depict items and characters. The former include: speed potion (gives a character an extra 3AP immediately), sword (+1 attack), armor (+1 defense), rope (to get over pit traps), fireball wand (a one-shot device usable by the wizard only that kills another character stone dead), and treasure (carry it out of the dungeon to score extra victory points).

Each character has two statistics -- Speed for movement, and Strength for combat. Most characters have a Strength of 2 and a Speed of 3, but really the stats for any one character are exactly what you would expect them to be. Thus the Troll has a high Strength and low Speed, and the Thief has a high Speed and low Strength.

What really sets the characters apart are their special abilities. Then again, these are also what you would expect them to be. The Cleric heals wounded characters, the Thief de-activates pit traps so that he and others can cross them, the Troll regenerates, and the Wizard can levitate across pit traps and use scrolls. Unfortunately scrolls do not appear in this game, but will in expansions. The first expansion, *Paladins & Dragons,* is already available, which not only adds scrolls, but also other new objects, characters, and tiles. More interesting are the abilities of the Meckanork and Wall Walker characters. The latter can walk through walls to access blocked corridors and rooms, while the former has Craftsmanship. With this, the Mekanork is the master at operating rotation gear, enabling him to turn both the dungeon tile he is on and its partner, in either direction, and not just in the direction of the indicated arrow. Finally there is the humble little Goblin. He has no special ability, but is worth extra victory points for getting him out of the dungeon.

Set up begins by placing the dungeon tiles face down in a two by four grid with a starting line placed at either end. Each player selects four characters out of his eight and puts them on his starting line. The remaining four character tokens, along with the items are placed face down on the eight dungeon tiles. These will be become active when each tile is turned face up.

In addition a player also has a deck of 16 cards. These consist of nine combat cards, three jump cards, and four action cards. The first are used in a fight, the second to let a character to jump over a pit, and the last to determine how many Action Points the player has in any one turn.

On his turn a player selects an action card and spends the points shown. That action card cannot be used again until the others have been used. The other two card types, combat and jump, are discarded after use. Combat cards are used whenever a fight ensues and range in value from +0 to +6. In combat, both sides select a card, and upon revealing it the player adds the value to his character's Strength score. The highest result wounds the other character. A wounded character can still fight but has his Strength reduced to zero. If the character loses another fight, he dies and the victor gains another Victory Point. A Wounded character can be healed by the Cleric to restore his Strength. After the fight, both combat cards are discarded, except for the +0 combat card which can be used again and again. Any unused cards and held objects can be kept hidden by each player's screen, also used as a reference.

A game, which should rarely last more than 45 minutes (and two thirds that time if the players are practised) is won when a player scores five Victory Points, or VP. These are gained for killing opposing characters, and getting characters out of the dungeon, the exit being the opponent's entrance or starting line. An additional VP can be scored if the Goblin escapes or the treasure is carried out. A mixture of the three usually guarantees a win.

Physically, the game is very well presented. The sturdy components all come in strong colors, with the clearly illustrated rulebook making every effort to make both rules and game play easy to understand.

There is almost nothing random about the playing of *Dungeon Twister* and that extends as far as the tile layout within the two by four grid. Everything else is determined by a player -- how many Action Points he has in a turn, how they are spent, and how strong a character is in combat. Essentially this is a matter of resource management for all three card types, but beyond this the player is presented with an array of options in the characters and character abilities. In its way, the game offers up both tactical and strategic choices from one turn to the next. This together serves to make *Dungeon Twister* a tight design that offers plenty of replay value.

--Matthew Pook

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Adventures in Reality And Other Dangerous Places

As we returned from picking up the car carrier, my friend Robert commented, "Gee, Nick looks like he's dying."

Some time later we learned that he wasn't. But at the time, as my father-in-law Nick laid on the rent-a-truck's ramp, he looked quite a bit like he was grimacing or pained in some level of discomfort, perhaps because of the extreme heat and exertion of trying to help load the van with the contents of our apartment. We didn't think too much else of this as we attempted to line up the car carrier within the parking spaces of our apartment's lot. But as the maneuvers continued, I realized that a fleeting image captured by my retinas seemed more significant: a dolly full of boxes was lying to the side of the ramp.

My mind started putting the pieces together; I darted out of Robert's truck and headed toward the apartment, noticing Nick was no longer in his prone position on the ramp; as I got near my soon-to-be-former abode, my mother-in-law walked briskly toward me, asking, "Where's the nearest clinic?" Unfortunately, I stammered something utterly incoherent and utterly useless; I use MapQuest to figure out how to get out of a Disneyland teacup, and after two years in my home city I was little more knowledgeable about where most things were than when my own rental truck -- similar to the one being loaded by Nick mere minutes before -- first arrived.

Fortunately my wife came to my rescue, car keys in hand; "I know where to go," she said, her father in tow, and all three left in our car, leaving Robert and I with a quarter-loaded truck and no idea what was happening.

We were left to muddle through as best we could for a few hours; the fear and confusion of what was happening abated somewhat quickly thanks to a cell phone call informing us that Nick was afraid he had broken one of his fingers in a mishap while loading the truck. This revelation merely left the two of us to figure out how to take over the arduous task of truck-loading for the foreseeable future, as we waited for word from . . . well, anyone.

This anecdote is all preamble for my thesis statement: To keep players on their toes and to keep games really interesting, it can be *very* helpful for each player to know things that the others don't, by splitting up that lore among them. For non-RPGs, I've found this to be one of the most interesting aspects of many games; for example, much of the post-hand discussion for card games such as Hearts or Spades is the discussion for what the various players had in their hands: "I had the Ace and Jack of Hearts, so I didn't know if I should play the Jack to try to suss out the 10 or play the Ace and hope to get both the King and the Queen from the other players . . ."

One of the most obvious methods for splitting information up among players is to run different parts for different players. For example, a campaign with four players could have each one engage in a one-hour solo-mini-adventure for their characters, which leads into the larger one. Different elements of the group adventure could have a direct bearing on the other, and each PC would have a potential moment to shine: "Wait; the guard's whistling a tune that I heard this little girl singing yesterday before she pulled a gun on me. I didn't think anything of it 'til now . . ." It can also be used in various other ways, such as giving each player a clue, background, or power that the others don't know about. (In fact, as I typed that previous sentence, I had a vision of a low-powered supers game: What if each PC started play as an escapee from the Three Wishes military project, which gave each member three powers that could only be used once apiece, and *only* if they never told anyone else about them . . . since revealing what you can do would disrupt the wish-tech that makes it possible? Sure, a hero might have the ability to transmute all of a single object to gold, but he can only do it once -- how does he do it, and when? And can he resist the temptation to blab about it with his friends?)

As another random aside, the method of "splitting up" the group also works well in real-world long-term relationships; by both partners having their own interests and activities, the couple ensures having something to talk about when they return.

Anyway, back to our anecdotes. Less than six hours after our drama had originally began the matter had been more or less resolved; Nick had merely dislocated his finger and -- with it in the brace -- he was able to continue helping us move. And this wasn't the only adventure that kept things interesting for the group during the course of this move. For

example, when we picked up the aforementioned rental car carrier, we did so with the intention of using one of our trucks instead of the rental van, only to discover that the brake light hookup was designed solely for the rental truck. This led to some consternation and fear of personal safety (not to mention law-abidingness), until we discovered an interesting loophole -- if one never applies the brakes, one never need be accused of not having brake lights; fortunately, attaching a 1,500-pound car carrier to one's vehicle provides all the stopping power one really needs. And then, when the four of us drove off in three different vehicles, we had some *more* adventures . . .

Groups get together because they can know or do things that others can't. Playing up that aspect can result in more chances for adventure, and more opportunities to learn about other adventures. And with a good enough group, you can even move a household six hundred miles to a new state.

--Steven Marsh

The Omniscient Eye

How Can I Live on the Moon?

What would it take to put a self-sustaining colony on the Moon?
--Rick Rutherford

Self-sustaining: *Able to provide for your own needs without help from others.*

Whether a lunar colony is "self-sustaining" depends on how high a standard you want to hold it to. We'll look at three -- a small outpost not needing outside supplies, an industrial site producing enough to pay for any supplies it needs, and a permanent settlement big enough to keep the human race going by itself.

Outpost

Avoiding regular supply runs to a lunar base is a good thing in any design. Space flight is expensive -- with current systems it would cost about $30,000 per pound to get to the moon. Depending on outside supplies endangers the lives of the occupants if anything interrupts the schedule. The International Space Station faced this problem after the Columbia disaster. A catastrophe at the moon base may also be easier to survive if the resources needed to survive are already on site.

A small outpost doesn't need much to survive. With a reliable power supply and a source of consumables for the crew they can last for years without needing to expand the facility or travel. Solar arrays are the usual first choice for powering near-future space operations, but photovoltaic cells have a limited lifespan. After five years they've already lost 10-15% of their power generation capacity. More stable sources could be a nuclear plant or a solar-dynamic power generator. The latter is a steam turbine, using concentrated sunlight instead of coal to boil the water (or other working fluid). Solar-dynamic is the easiest option to maintain. Only simple plumbing and machinist skills are needed for repairs, without needing to bake silicon chips or work in a high-radiation environment.

The crew of the outpost won't care about the lights being on if they run out of food, water, or oxygen, so the life support system is the next priority. Throwing away used food supplies (to keep this PG rated) makes them dependent on new supplies. To avoid that they have to "close the cycle" for their needs, recycling waste products into new food and fresh air and water. Extensive research has been done on "Closed Ecological Life Support Systems." The most famous was the Biosphere 2 experiment, but experiments have been done as early as the 1960s. The Soviet Bios-3 experiment required about 140 kW of power and 8 square meters of algae tank exposed to light for each occupant and held three men for 180 days.

Biosphere 2 topped that with an eight-person, two-year experiment. This place didn't just try to keep the people alive but build a whole multiple-climate ecology around them with over 3,800 species in a 3.15 acre greenhouse. All eight humans survived but the ecology wasn't sustainable. Three quarters of the vertebrate species went extinct, along with all the pollinating insects. Prolonging the experiment would probably have led to the ecology collapsing

Transportation To the Moon . . .

If you try building a moon base today it'll cost you about $10,000 a pound to get your payload into low Earth orbit. Three-quarters of that will have to be fuel to getting it from there to the Moon if you're using chemical rockets. That makes the delivery charge for a 30-ton base nearly three billion dollars. If you've got something larger in mind it's probably worth your while to invest in a cheaper way to get there first.

Current launch technology is outrageously expensive because the rockets are expendable. Piles of carefully machined hardware are discarded in orbit after a single use. Since you can't give each one a test drive to detect manufacturing flaws you have to obsessively inspect

to a minimal mix of "weed" plants and opportunistic animals. A less ambitious system would be easier to set up and keep stable but would have poor resilience. A disease taking out one species could cripple a simple ecology, but a complex one would have another species available to take over the role. Humans are also happier with a varied diet and a view of trees and birds, so the more species the life support system can support the higher morale will be.

Sufficiently advanced nanotechnology could reprocess wastes with near-perfect efficiency, but that level of technology makes the problem trivial, so let's assume near-future tech. That means turning "fertilizer" into food the old-fashioned way, with plants. Tanks of algae can process wastes while producing oxygen. Fresh water can be filtered out and the excess algae eaten. It's not a complete diet, though. The crew would suffer from vitamin and protein deficiencies, as well as being bored to the point of insanity. To get a complete (vegetarian) diet a garden is needed with a variety of plants. Putting a greenhouse the size of Biosphere 2 on the lunar surface is a lovely image, and would give workers on the surface something to rest their eyes on, but it's not very practical. The two-week lunar night would require full artificial lighting anyway, and trying to keep a transparent room intact from micrometeorites and moonquakes would be very expensive.

The base's garden would be underground, dispersed in several chambers for safety against blowouts, and containing a mix of plants. Sewage would be processed by algae and mechanical mechanisms before being fed to the garden. If the crew wanted meat they could have small animals (rabbits at the largest) in cages, or possibly fish or amphibians in the algae tanks.

Even with efficient recycling the base will lose some materials from leaks and accidents. Oxygen and metals are everywhere on the moon, if you have the facilities to break down the rocks, but volatile elements are scarce. To stretch out its endurance the base would be located near some of the polar ice deposits found by the Clementine probe. These are the remnants of old comet impacts, and have a mix of frozen water, ammonia, and methane which can be added to the life support system. The ice lies in the bottom of craters which are in permanent shadow (the Moon's poles are almost perpendicular to its orbit, so they don't get the long periods of day and night that Earth's do). This also allows an outpost at the poles to get continuous solar power by placing a receiver on a peak which is always [in sunlight](#).

An outpost like this wouldn't be able to do much other than survive. Research scientists would be happy there until they'd finished exploring the nearby area, but wouldn't have fuel to travel to other interesting areas. Establishing one would probably come from national pride, either to demonstrate technological prowess or to prevent another nation from claiming exclusive rights to the moon. Few colonists would be willing to live on such a narrow margin, but religiously or ideologically motivated ones might take the chance that something will come along before they hit the limit of their endurance.

Industry

Another way for a moon base to be self-sustaining is to produce enough valuable goods to be able to pay for the supplies it needs. There's been plenty of speculation on potential exports from the Moon. If one of them is practical

them for any problems, adding more millions to the price of each flight (and you still lose over 1% of your payloads). The Space Shuttle reuses some of its hardware, but makes up for by adding even more inspections and maintenance. That makes it the most expensive way to get to space (losing 1.7% of the flights) at about $26,000 a pound (though the price charged for delivering a payload may be as low as zero, depending on how the accounting is done).

There's numerous concepts for reducing the cost of getting to orbit. The most popular is a Reusable Launch Vehicle (RLV). This would be a rocket built according to the Space Shuttle's original goal, taking off and landing in one piece so it can fly again as soon as it's refueled. This reduces costs by using the same hardware repeatedly and improves reliability by testing the vehicle before putting a payload on it. This can bring the cost to LEO down to $100/lb for each flight. The price to the customer will be dominated by the need to pay off the cost of building the system. A new RLV will need several times the number of payloads being launched now to cover its up-front costs. The likelihood of such customers appearing when launch costs are lower is hotly debated among RLV advocates. The initial cost would be $2-10 billion depending on the size and type of the RLV.

Bigger cost reductions would require giving up on rocket engines. Lasers, cannons, and catapults have been proposed to provide an initial boost, but rockets would still be needed to

the base can pay back its construction costs and still make enough profit to import what it needs.

LOX: The Moon's surface is mostly oxides made of magnesium, silicon, iron, and other metals, with oxygen forming over 40% of the mass of the crust. With enough energy the rocks can be broken down into their component metal and oxygen. Oxygen is the majority of the propellant mass used by rockets. The Moon could supply the oxygen for orbital maneuvers and cut the amount of mass that has to be brought up from Earth. An interplanetary expedition could get half or more of its initial mass from lunar oxygen. This assumes a reasonably cheap way of delivering tanks of LOX -- see the sidebar on transportation.

Metals: As the complement to LOX production the base can refine iron, aluminum, titanium, and other metals. This could be exported as raw stock or formed into parts. LOX tanks would certainly be made on site. New orbital facilities can have their structures built on the Moon or expand them with parts shipped down. You can increase the complexity of the products until you've moved into:

Manufacturing: Just exporting raw materials will probably require enough tools to build rocket engines and propellant tanks. Expanding that into more complex structures and machines only requires a marginal increase in the factory capability. This can be installed incrementally as the demand increases, instead of having to make a major capital investment up front. Manufacturing is a very good specialty for a self-sufficient base -- anything it can make it doesn't have to import.

Solar Power: Cities on Earth can be powered by vast arrays of solar cells beaming electricity down to them from space. There's two main versions of the concept out there. The first is SPS (Solar Power Satellites), a set of 50 square kilometer satellites in geostationary orbit (GEO) that send power down to a receiving antenna on Earth. SPSs would be assembled in orbit from parts manufactured on the Moon.

The alternative is a Lunar Power System (LPS). This puts the solar arrays on the Moon's surface. If the arrays can't fit on a site with continuous sunlight they'll have to be duplicated on the other side of the so one will always be on the day side. The power would be beamed directly to Earth or to a relay satellite in Earth orbit. The transmission is more difficult than from GEO because of both the distance and the geometry (it's hard to maintain a connection with a receiver which is rotating out of sight).

Which option (SPS/LPS) is better depends on whether the transportation costs of getting the SPS material to GEO outweighs the cost of doubling the arrays and handling the transmission difficulties. A lunar base would be better sustained by LPS. Once the SPSs are built the demand for lunar manufacturing could collapse, while an LPS will still need the base to support maintenance and operations.

Helium-3: Fusion power researchers theorize that using He3 may allow safer power production than more common deuterium, since the helium isotope emits 99% fewer neutrons in the reaction. The Sun emits He3 as part of the solar wind. The lunar regolith (the thick layer of dust and power the Moon has in

go from low Earth orbit to the Moon. A space elevator can carry a payload into orbit and drop it into a trajectory which takes it to the Moon, only needing its own power for landing. A space elevator (aka skyhook or beanstalk) is a cable running from the Earth's equator to a counterweight past geosynchronous orbit, held in tension by centrifugal force. At about 28,000 miles altitude an object released from the elevator will be flung to lunar orbit or beyond. All that it takes to get it up there is the electricity to run the elevator. That could go as low as $10 a pound. That doesn't cover the cost of building the elevator. Current proposals range from $6-40 billion, but the key structural technology (kilometer-long carbon nanotubes) doesn't exist yet, and historical experience shows a zero or two may be added to those costs.

If you can't wait for new technology to be developed, or to put up your moon base a piece at a time with conventional rockets, there's one more option. An "Orion Drive" spaceship uses atomic bombs for propulsion. Put an A-bomb under your (very sturdy) spacecraft, set it off, and watch the ship go up. With a mechanism to keep flinging bombs under the ship you have a very high-thrust, high-efficiency space drive. Orion can scale up to handle thousands of tons of payload in a single flight, for a fuel cost of less than a dollar per pound. Though if you're building an Orion, you're probably not worried about costs as much as the war or imminent disaster

place of soil) traps the He3 particles in an easily-released bond. Extracting it would involve large crawler vehicles scooping up regolith, heating it to release He3 and other trapped volatiles, condensing out the gases, and dropping the regolith back on the ground. This gets repeated until the mining area looks like a plowed field. The collected He3 is gathered from each crawler and then rocketed back to Earth as a very small package.

The problem with this vision is the feasibility of fusion for power production is unproven. The field has been worse at meeting its predictions than almost any other. Even if a working fusion method is found it may not use He3. So this may not be a good bet for a lunar base's main income.

Antimatter: Another compact energy storage material is antimatter. It's the densest possible fuel which makes it very appealing to spacecraft and other mass-limited applications. Manufacturing it could be a very hazardous activity -- any mishandling of the antimatter would bring it into contact with regular matter with an instant explosion. That's the sort of activity that gets put a long way from residential neighborhoods. A lunar antimatter factory would confine the danger to its staff. This function probably wouldn't mix well with other lunar base functions. If a large base was already in place the antimatter production facility would probably be placed far away . . . and probably on the other side of a mountain range. (GMs including this possibility in their games should resist the temptation to leave the *Space: 1999* DVDs out where the players can see them.)

Research Facilities: A lunar base can host research which needs to be kept away from residential areas. Some are too hazardous to perform on Earth. Biological engineering and self-replicating nanotechnology could produce plagues that wipe out nearby areas. Isolating that type of research on the Moon can assure safety. Other projects may be low-risk but placed on the Moon to avoid protestors who don't trust that assessment. The far side of the moon is an ideal site for astronomers, who need to avoid interference from Earth's swarming bright lights and radio transmitters.

Tourism: Space tourism is currently the most promising path for expanding into space. Once cruises around the planet and orbital hotels become routine tourists will look for more interesting destinations. The Moon has three attractions for tourists -- historical sites such as the Apollo landings, scenic vistas in the mountains, and low-gravity activities (such as new forms of flying, dancing, and swimming that aren't practical on Earth or in free-fall). A lunar amusement park would also draw visitors from orbital facilities who want a cheaper (or less stressful) vacation than going back to Earth.

Colony

A truly self-sustaining moon base is one that can continue to survive even if Earth went away. Roger MacBride Allen wrote a novel with just that premise *(Ring of Charon)* and tracked the struggles of the off-planet colonists to survive. *Space: 1999* sent the Moon on an interstellar journey by itself. *Fallen Angels* showed off-planet settlers cut off by political opponents. The likeliest cause of losing contact with Earth is war, either ruining the Earth or blockading the Moon. A lunar colony may cut its own ties in a revolution -- its level of self-sufficiency will constrain the decision to attempt a revolt. For long-term survival the colony will need an adequate population, the ability to manufacture essential equipment, and the means to access new sources of raw materials.

which forced you into using this noisy, dirty option.

. . . And Back Again

The economic benefit of producing things on the Moon is lost if you have to bring propellant all the way from Earth to deliver it. The polar ice deposits could be electrolyzed to generate hydrogen fuel but that might be a wasteful use of a scarce resource. The classic solution is to use an electromagnetic catapult, flinging payloads to their destination. Unless they're going straight to Earth or some other destination that can catch them as they fly by a guidance system and rocket engine will still be needed to maneuver the payload into a rendezvous with the destination. If only a small impulse is needed a "cold gas" rocket can be used, venting oxygen gas through a nozzle. Inefficient, but easy and cheap. If high performance is needed the oxygen can be burned with hydrogen from the polar ice or fuel imported from Earth. A middle option using only lunar resources is to burn aluminum powder. Mixing powder with a gas makes for a difficult engineering problem -- an Al-O2 rocket may have to operate in pulses, giving the payload a rough ride. It can also be rough on destinations since the exhaust is pure superheated oxygen mixed with abrasive particles. But it doesn't require imports.

Experiments with pigs have demonstrated that to avoid dangerous inbreeding an isolated population needs at least 250 individuals. That assumes a gender-balanced group of healthy people. Hazardous jobs in harsh environments tend to have a predominately male population. One of those hazards is radiation exposure, which can leave a victim fit for work but unable to produce healthy children. Unless lunar society has a completely different structure, as in Heinlein's *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress,* only couples with both members fertile will count toward the sustainable population. The population may have to have over 1,000 people to be sustainable. One close to the minimum may have to put restrictions on potential parents restricting them from hazardous duties even if that causes social tension.

The manufacturing base doesn't need to make everything but it does have to replace all essential parts. The colony may have to operate at a lower tech level for an extended period if it can't support all of its modern equipment. Basic life support could be maintained using technology from the 1930s or 1940s if the base has been designed for it (for example, centered on a solar-dynamic power plant with manual backup controls). If the base depends on a fusion reactor for power then obviously it would need that technology base to survive. A government wanting to keep control of its lunar colony may prohibit importing equipment to build key components.

Even if the colony is founded on top of a major resource such as a polar ice deposit, it will need to import more material. Producing electronics will require small amounts of boron, arsenic, and other elements. More trace elements may be needed for vitamins and other life support needs. Finding the non-volatile materials will require prospecting trips to locate sources. Given the amounts needed the prospectors can bring home their finds rather than having a mining crew come out to collect tons of material. The prospectors will probably concentrate on the asteroids for metals and other minerals -- their low gravity will make it easier to visit multiple sites.

Volatiles -- water and other materials for organics -- are needed in larger quantities. The atmosphere and water supply have to make up losses from leaks and expand to match a growing population. There's a variety of sources elsewhere in the solar system. Many asteroids are carbonaceous chondrites, with significant amounts of water, carbon, and nitrogen. Comets are mostly ice (water, methane, and carbon dioxide). The Jovian moons allow large-scale extraction facilities. Or the lunar colonists can range farther. Literary examples range from Saturn's rings (Asimov's "The Martian Way") to dipping into Earth's atmosphere *(Fallen Angels).*

The fuel to reach a source would matter more than the distance. A well-timed asteroid or comet could be easier to get to than Earth. An expedition might be launched years before the supplies are needed just to take advantage of some favorable geometry. Since most volatiles also double as rocket fuel, an expedition would have an easier time sending home full loads of material.

Conclusion

So, what would it take? That depends on how self-sustaining you want to be. A minimal base with a good greenhouse could still let you live there for most of your life before something broke down. If you want to have a secure existence -- and even let your colony grow -- you'll need a large enough population and the industry to find and build whatever it needs. The good news is you can add to your base gradually until you have enough infrastructure. All you have to do is get someone to pay for it.

--Karl Gallagher

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 Pick From The Past

Sherpa, Second Edition

Written by Steffan O'Sullivan

Published by Two Tigers Games

28-page staple-bound digest-size softcover; $8.00

Sherpa, subtitled "A Role-Playing Game for Outdoor Use," never got a review in *Pyramid,* though it was mentioned twice (once in 1997, when the "pre-first edition" debuted on the web, and then again in 1999 when the first print edition appeared, though the then-editor misattributed the publisher). This is a shame, since *Sherpa* is cute, light, and fun, much like the marshmallows you'd expect to scorch on a camp-out. (Please don't roast a copy of *Sherpa* on a stick. It won't end well.)

Before we strike out for the wilderness, remember that 1992 to 1995 was the prime development period for *Fudge,* when author Steffan O'Sullivan conducted an experiment in game design and development via public newsgroups and mailing lists. With *Fudge* behind him, O'Sullivan turned to the problem of roleplaying outdoors. And if you like the outdoors and want to roleplay outside without resorting to LARPing, it *is* a problem: character sheets blow away, pencils break, rulebooks are just too heavy to schlep around the countryside, and if you can find a reasonably flat place to roll a die it will probably drop into something-or-other's burrow. How do you address these problems?

Problem 1: character sheets blow away. Solution: reduce the character information to what can fit comfortably on a typical business card. *Sherpa* characters have six attributes, a gift (or two) and a fault (or two). Of the attributes, Profession is the most important: it encompasses everything related to your working way of life. The other five attributes (Experience, Reason, Agility, Strength, Health) fill in gaps for traits outside your "class". Attributes start at 4; additional points are given for customization based on the story potential of the character (from "ordinary folks" to "true heroes"). Gifts and faults flesh out the character's abilities with non-quantifiable traits. They don't cost points or give points, they just add flavor (although a supernormal gift like psi or magic might be linked to an attribute and so make that attribute more expensive to customize).

Problem 2: Writing is inconvenient. Well, you have to write down the character sheet on your little card, there's no way around that. But once that's done, it's done. The other transactions are reckoned in points or tokens: either luck (letting the player push game events in his favor) or wounds. The author suggests "poker chips, colored stones, checkers, bingo chits, emeralds . . .", but plastic mini-poker chips or gaming stones (perhaps clear for luck and red for wounds) would be nigh-ideal choices: easy to tell apart, convenient to carry, simple to pass back and forth on the trail, and no financial burden if lost. (We suspect the author's suggestion of emeralds might have been facetious.)

Problem 3: Rulebooks are heavy. Solution: Confine the essential rules to fit on a 3" x 5" index card. First rule: Both GM and player must be descriptive. The GM assigns modifiers to the character's trait, both for the difficulty of the situation and for how the player handles the scene. In most cases the resolution of the situation becomes obvious. In borderline cases, the player can spend luck tokens to clinch the matter. But some gamers really like their element of chance. On to the next problem.

Problem 4: dice like "smooth" and "flat" . . . both rare conditions in nature. Solution: Use a digital stopwatch, either the real sports kind that Coach used to keep on a lanyard around his thick neck or the kind hidden in most wristwatches these days. It needs to count in tenths or hundredths of a second. The gamemaster lets this run continuously through the game. When a random number is called for, the GM *without looking* stops the watch and consults the usually-racing right-most digit. This becomes the "roll," a 0-9 result. Count that 0 as a 10, please, and

restart the watch so it's ready for the next event.

Back to problem 3, then. For an "unopposed" task, compare the "roll" to the modified attribute. If the attribute is greater than or equal to the roll, the task succeeds. A "roll" of 10 always fails. For "opposed" tasks, add the "roll" to the modified attribute; the opposition does the same; and the highest total wins. Thus endeth the rules. They are, really, simple enough to memorize easily and so dispense with the reference card. With the adventure notes also jotted on index cards, though, one card more or less won't matter.

Play in *Sherpa* is necessarily rather freeform. Combat and damage are handled in a mostly descriptive manner, with the GM reckoning the quality of the attack (as reflected in the roll-modified attribute), the quality of the defenses (armor, etc.) and the natural lethality of the weapon. This all gets boiled down to how many wound points/tokens to hand out. While suggestions for character improvement are offered, *Sherpa* isn't really meant for long-term play. "Think of it as a mini game convention in the park or the wild!" encourages the author.

The original incarnation of *Sherpa* was as a web document, and that game is still available at http://www.panix.com/~sos/ rpg/s2.html. But the game has grown (a little), into a tidy 28-page booklet that, problem 2 aside, you wouldn't feel bad about slipping into your pack or hiding in your bedroll. The print version contains more example characters, several sample gifts, a few variant rules (for handling fighting multiple foes, for instance, or party gifts and faults), a few monsters, ample play examples, and an index that would put many larger books to shame. The layout is pleasantly basic, and there's no interior art, but for 28 small pages you likely won't mind. It's also entertainingly written, no surprise from this author but an increasingly rare gift in any medium.

The self-published, self-designed, paradigm-fracturing roleplaying game is all the rage these days. Maybe it's not wildly unconventional, but *Sherpa* was out at the frontier of this realm well before the cool kids got there. And copies are still available directly from the publisher. (Ordering instructions can be found at http://www.panix.com/~sos/rpg/sherpa.html.) For the price of a single admission (and shipping the cost of a small drink) at the movie house, you can instead have a complete roleplaying game which you can play while walking the dogs, camping out, or hiding in the back row of the movie house. *Sherpa* encourages you to get out of that beanbag chair and go play outside, in more ways than one. Remember to take only pictures and leave only hit points.

--Bob Portnell

The Omniscient Eye

What's Required to Make Porcelain?

This came up in game today. We were on the trail of orcs who'd raided a lumber camp and had carried off a family of a trapper who lived further up the trail.

We caught up to the orcs, dealt them and rescued the still living captives. The GM descibed the loot they'd taken from this family's household.

He included *porcelain* plates and cups. I pointed out that medieval pocelain prices were higher than gold, but he said something about it not being that hard to mix clay paint it and fire it up.

Now I know a bit of the history of European attempts to discover the secret of Asian porcelain. My source described a lifetime's effort of a northern Italian potter in the late Renaissance era succeeded in firing a hard clear glaze which kind of sort of passed as porcelain except for breakability, absence of tanslucence, and so on.

And of the 1709 success of Bottger in making "red" pocelain, as well as his eventual experment with wig powder that produced a white pocelain and of Josiah Wedgewood's eventual development of Bone China.

In short, I don't buy my GM's claim for a nanosecond.

But just to settle things, the Chinese *did* have the right materials in the right place and produced it circa 900, so it's not impossible that it could be found in a 1200-ish setting. How likely is it that porcelain tech could be developed in a medieval setting and be available to peasants living waaaaaaaaay out in the boonies?
     --S.D. Anderson

Not hard to mix the clays and fire them up? Your GM would be well advised to pull the other one, which has bells on it.

Ceramics are an archaeologist's best friend. If you take wet clay, form it into whatever shape you desire, and heat it to a high enough temperature (as low as 700°C), a chemical change takes place. The clay fuses into a very stable form. So stable, in fact, it can withstand just about anything thousands of years of lying in the dirt can throw at it. The vessel may break, of course, but the pieces retain their shape and chemical composition, allowing archaeologists to come by hundreds or thousands of years later to examine how they were made, how they were decorated, what the original vessel might have held, and so on.

Once people start making ceramics, which they inevitably do as soon as they settle down and stop being hunter-gatherers, they do so in large quantities. It's clear that hunter-gatherers could have made ceramics. Indeed, sometimes they did, in the form of terra cotta figurines. The drawbacks of ceramic vessels, though, are that they are both heavy and brittle, so they're no good for nomads. But if you aren't going anywhere for a while, all you really need to make pottery are dirt from which clay can be refined and fires capable of reaching the right temperatures. It's cheap, easy, and very useful for storage.

But pottery isn't *just* clay. Pure clay can crack or deform when fired, so other materials, sometimes called sizing, are added. Often, the mixture is bits of crushed, already-fired pottery or simply sand, but other materials can be used for special purposes. Bricks, for example, are sometimes made by mixing straw into the clay, which lightens the mixture

significantly.

Ignoring purely decorative features like stamping or incising designs into the surface, a piece of pottery might also be surfaced with a number of substances. Vessels might be painted, treated with a slip (that is, coated with a liquid mixture of pure clay and water, giving it a smoother surface), or coated with a glaze, a substance which will give the vessel a glassy surface. Glazes do not themselves turn to glass. At least, they don't contain all the elements necessary to become glass. Rather, they contain substances such as lead, potassium, and sodium, which lower the melting point of silica. A coating of a glaze, which may be a powder or a liquid brushed on, causes the silica in the surface of the clay to *vitrify* (that is, become glassy) at relatively low temperatures. The same substances are mixed with silica-rich sand to produce glass, but that's a separate bit of technology. And, yes, lead-based glazes can be toxic in the long term.

All of these things and more are extremely useful to scholars, since, in any given place and time, only a limited set of the vast range of possible materials, techniques, and decorative styles is used. The thickness of a vessel's walls, marks of manufacture, decorative materials, decorative styles, and the like can be used to tell when it was made (down to a range of a decade or two in some cases) and by whom. Since pottery can retain fingerprint impressions, it's sometimes even possible to identify individual potters, though by the sheer volume of pottery produced and the chance of a piece with any given fingerprint surviving, that rarely happens.

There are many, many ways of categorizing ceramics, but probably the most useful one for our purposes is to start with a distinction between earthenware and stoneware. Earthenware ceramics are low-fired, heated from 700°C up to about 1200°C. 700°C is hotter than an ordinary open wood fire, but it's not a difficult temperature to achieve under controlled circumstances, so it's well within the reach of people in the Neolithic or even earlier. Earthenware pottery by itself is porous and so not ideal for storing liquids, though it can serve in the short term. It can also be treated with glazes to give the vessel a waterproof coating.

When ceramics are heated beyond 1200°C, the entire body vitrifies. The silica components of the clay fuses into a glassy structure. These are stonewares. Stonewares are inherently far more waterproof than earthenwares, so they hold liquids well without needing a glaze, though historically stonewares were usually glazed anyway. They do still absorb water, but not nearly as much. Stonewares are technologically more difficult to make, requiring more exactingly mixed clays and higher temperatures. The temperatures themselves aren't too difficult to reach. The ability to reach temperatures sufficient for stoneware is necessary for iron smelting as well, so the right temperatures become available at the beginning of a culture's iron age. However, furnaces capable of producing temperatures that high require more expensive fuel (charcoal instead of wood) and specialized furnaces, well beyond what the average village blacksmith is likely to use.

Moreover, raw temperature isn't enough. Archaeologists have found remains of pots made at very high temperatures before the development of appropriate admixtures and temperature control. Such vessels melt and collapse when fired. It turns out that the sizing in conventional earthenwares don't hold up to the high temperatures necessary to produce stonewares, and getting the right kinds of clays and additives to withstand those temperatures is harder than it might seem, even if you know that you can get a superior product out of a higher-fired ceramic, which is far from obvious. Europe didn't start producing stoneware until the late 1200s, even though they'd had furnaces producing sufficient temperatures for over two millennia.

So where does porcelain come into this? Although it usually ends up in a category of its own, porcelain is, by these definitions, a particular kind of stoneware, a high-fired, vitrified ceramic with a uniquely translucent fabric. It gets its particularly fine qualities from its slightly unusual raw material. Porcelain is composed mostly of kaolinite, a clay derived from weathered feldspar. Kaolinite isn't the most common of clays, but it's not vanishingly rare, either; it can be found on every continent, though not in every country. It's usually white, but can be yellow, or red, depending on the presence of other minerals. To achieve the particularly fine texture and translucent quality of porcelain, potters needed to develop a very specialized set of admixtures. Unlike regular pottery, where ground-up old pots could be used as sizing (since the pot was going to be opaque anyway), porcelain has more exacting demands, requiring less common and more expensive materials such as alabaster, ground glass, and ground quartz. On top of it all, kaolinite clay is harder to work than many other clays, since it is very sensitive to both over-wetting and drying out.

So, then: Porcelain requires high temperatures, special clays which may not be available in all areas, specially formulated additives, and more work than other pottery, but it does produce pottery with a very fine fabric which will be in high demand. Each of these factors throws an additional level of improbability into the equation. Could a bunch of peasants find and use a kaolinite-rich clay? Sure, although they might lean towards using less fussy clays with less kaolinite, if such clays are easily available. It's also possible, but extremely unlikely, that they could stumble over just the right combination of materials necessary to produce a kaolinite-based fabric capable of withstanding high temperatures and producing porcelain, though they might not know it right away. It's certainly far from obvious what materials go into porcelain and what proportions to use, but it's not a great leap of logic, particularly to a mind which grew up on alchemical thinking, that adding white and glassy materials like alabaster and quartz to a white clay like kaolin is a step in the right direction towards producing a white, glassy ceramic.

But even if all that comes to pass, the expensive and specialized nature of high-temperature furnaces remains a very large stumbling block. A potter won't get the necessary temperatures unless he makes a determined effort to reach them. Being part-time potters at best, rural potters won't waste their time trying to work with the difficult, expensive furnaces required to fire porcelain to the appropriate temperatures. Archaeological evidence bears this out. Pottery found on poor, rural archaeological sites is notably rough and ugly, low-fired earthenware designed for utility rather than appearance. Even glazes and other waterproofing measures, at least theoretically available from the Bronze Age on, are relatively uncommon in peasant-made pottery. Shiny, high-fired ceramics were made by urban professionals (so were swords, by the way; a blacksmith in a tiny village who can make dragon-slaying swords is about as mythical as the dragons themselves). They had to be, since only wealthy urbanites could afford their expensive, highly decorated wares. When Europe finally cracked the porcelain question, the work was done by professional artisans, who had access to a wide range of clays and minerals, not just what happened to be available locally, and who had the time and money to experiment with various mixtures of materials and firing procedures. Could a lone, stubborn peasant be extremely lucky with local clays and extremely persistent with furnace designs, eventually making (much to his surprise) porcelain? It's not physically impossible, but only just.

But let's say that the peasants did somehow stumble over the secrets of manufacturing porcelain, of which there are a great many. Perhaps the culture hero Chinashoppius brought a secret formulation of clay back from the underworld and the villagers have special dowsing rods which find kaolinite deposits and a tame salamander producing super-hot temperatures. In that very unlikely set of circumstances, potters from the nearest town would move in and start making money quickly. Or, perhaps, the people who discovered the secret would move to the nearest town to practice their new art to the same effect. One could quibble about whether or not the value of porcelain in Medieval Europe was higher than gold, but it's clear that even in societies where porcelain was widely available, it was the Wedgwood and Waterford of the age, whereas peasants used the equivalent of plates bought at Wal-Mart and novelty cups from McDonalds. This was doubly the case in Medieval Europe, where all the porcelain had to be shipped in from the far east. It would be simply a matter of time until word got out of a little town where the peasants made pottery of unparalleled fineness, and in short order it region would become a notable center of pottery manufacture.

But rather than just telling your GM that he's wrong, which he most certainly is, let's help him out. If the setting *is* Medieval Europe, there's not much you can do to justify a mere peasant, or anyone else for that matter, having a locally produced set of porcelain dishes. There's simply no precedent for the technology at the time and little realistic chance of it arising unnoticed in a remote village. We can, at least, give it a somewhat more plausible backstory. Maybe the dishes were the prized possession of a nobleman, brought from the Far East by dhow and camel, then traded along to Europe by an adventurous merchant or carried back by a returning Crusader until they ended up in someone's stronghold. At that point, we can appeal to warfare. The most recent owner of the dishes, a soldier in his younger days, was lucky enough to be one of the first to the loot during a particularly successful battle and managed to spirit the expensive dishes away to his hut where they remain his most valuable property. Still fairly unlikely, certainly, but not quite as bad as a remote village independently inventing such a valuable substance.

On the other hand, if the setting is a fantasy world which *closely resembles* Medieval Europe, the GM has more room to maneuver. After all, the Chinese invented porcelain by, at the very latest, the 9th century, and there are those who argue, depending on the definition of porcelain, that they did it as early as the 3rd (there's a distinction between "soft" low-fired kaolinite ceramics, which are opaque, and "hard," translucent, vitrified porcelains which we recognize as particularly fine pottery). When the Europeans repeated the invention, they did so after a long process of trial and

error, not because of other recent inventions and supporting technological breakthroughs. This is one of those developments where it isn't the big technological idea which makes a difference so much as the fiddly little details. This could simply be a place which looks a lot like Europe but where all the right elements came together to give them porcelain far earlier than happened in our history. It doesn't make a huge difference in related technologies, so about the only effect that would have is to make porcelain available and relatively inexpensive, though the relative rarity of the raw materials, difficulty of working the clay, and other costs would still make it significantly more expensive than regular peasant pottery. However, rather than originating in a tiny village in the middle of nowhere, the dishes would still have originated in the workshops of urban craftsmen.

--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!

Everything to Everyone

Omniman and the Supers Continuum
(with stats for *Tri-Stat dX*)

by Brian Rogers

"One of the things that interests me most about genre is that it's impossible to define. It's a circular set of definitions: a genre is defined by the conventions established by the set of works that belong to it, but a work is defined to belonging to a genre based on its use of those conventions"
--Paul Mason, *Fluxus #50*

Observations on the superhero genre:

1. it sets the definitions wide, accepting anything where people have super-powers and/or wear costumes;
2. it lacks accepted labels for sub-genres such as those found in Fantasy or Science Fiction.

This leads to problems when you're designing a superhero game. You can think your players are with you for your *X-Men*-inspired game, only to find that two have internalized the massive government conspiracy, one is looking for youngsters learning to use their powers under their FBI-backed mentor, one wants to visit savage lands and alien worlds, one is prepped for the mutant vs. mutant war and no one is on board with your heroic soap-opera. Oh, and one of the government conspiracy players expects lethal fights, while the other is all for the no-one-dies four-color style. In short no one is satisfied, despite all liking the *X-Men* idea.

A campaign prospectus is a good way to mitigate this, but another thing that helps is having a way to discuss the sub-genres of superheroes, and how those relate to things that aren't other super heroes.

The Supers Continuum

Super-hero stories can be charted on a graph where the X axis scales from Adventure to Wonderment, and the Y axis runs from Fantasy to Realism. Placing the types of stories you want to tell on that graph will tell your players the game's thematic center, and improve the chances that you'll all really be in the same book.

Adventure

Adventure comics use conflict, generally combat, to drive the story. Puzzles, either criminal mysteries or tactical problems, are interspersed between the fight scenes, but it's possible to have an adventure game that is all fighting, where the heroes just wait for their crime computer to tell them where the latest robbery is taking place. Likewise the game could be 90% mysteries, with the heroes tracking down and outwitting a conspiracy Mission Impossible style, but the driving force remains a conflict.

Adventure stories are plotted like *Feng Shui* adventures -- a series of conflicts bridged together by relatively simple investigations. Thematically adventure stories parallel *Dungeons & Dragons* dungeon crawls: opposition set to be challenging but not overwhelming, hoards of ork/mooks to fight through before reaching the main villain, and often freedom of movement in a limited area (the villain's base). Add in heroes learning new power stunts every few adventures and you have a clean level-up process. Avid *d20 System* gamers will have little problem translating virgin-stealing dragons and their kobold followers the into an army of snake-themed thugs in the thrall of "The Hydroid" kidnapping the mayor's daughter. They might want to leave fewer corpses behind them, of course . . .

The majority of comic books fall on the adventure side of the graph, with costumed vigilantes interrupting or tracking

down criminals to give them a sound thrashing in the name of justice, or super-humans fighting off alien fleets or stopping natural disasters.

Wonder

Wonderment comics use discovery and exploration as story motivators and the puzzles are scientific or social. Fights, if they happen at all, are short and conclusive ("this conflict is pointless, but we must be careful not to kill any of them!"), interrupted ("Halt, my loyal guards, so these strangers can identify themselves to the high priest of Nova Maya!"), or glossed over ("For several minutes the RoMayans energy spears faced off against our heroes' radiation-spawned powers . . ."). The stories can be one shots smoothing relations with crocodile worshipers under Manhattan or multi-part explorations of the Fractal Zone, but the focus is on finding the sorts of strange new things that exist in a world already willing to accept superhuman powers.

Wonderment games are similar to culture & exploration games, such as *[Star Trek,](#)* with its emphasis on the stories being moral space opera (as opposed to *[Prime Directive,](#)* which is the Adventure version of *Star Trek*) or mythic games like *Everway.* Gamers who lean to space opera or fairy tales will understand super-explorers who find Greek cities on Venus or subterranean dinosaur herders, and super-powers are similar to magical gifts or hyper-tech.

Wonder comics are more rare, and that makes them stand out: the *Fantastic Four* and *Tom Strong* are quintessential imaginauts, but *Astro City's* revelations of life inside a supers world, *Promethea's* spiritual voyage or *Planetary's* archaeology of the 20th century are equally focused on the wondrous and strange.

Fantastic

On the other axis, Fantastic stories focus on the super nature of being super-human. Conflict is non-lethal (unless someone makes *a sacrifice*) and power use tends toward the creative and over the top. Heroes often have magical powers, and even "scientific" heroes have just a nodding acquaintance with actual science. The good/evil conflict is clear cut, and philosophical issues work around either the interplay between anthropomorphicly embodied cosmic forces, the place of humans in the universe and the assistance of either individual people or whole alien worlds.

It's easy to equate Fantastic games with comedy RPGs, and people drawn to *Toon* or *Ghostbusters* will likely enjoy a whimsical fantasy game. However, people interested in *Nobilis* or *Amber* could fit into fantastic supers games once they accepted cosmic forces wearing skintight uniforms.

Fantastic stories run the gamut from whimsical, with Otto Binder and CC Beck's Captain Marvel, Marvel family, and Talking Tawney fighting the Seven Deadly Sins; to cosmic, with Jim Starlin's Adam Warlock dying as a pawn in the battle between life, death, order, and chaos.

Realistic

Realistic games focus on the human aspect of super-human. Conflict can be lethal, so heroes usually pull their punches. Powers tend toward the scientific, and scientific theories are the guidelines for creative power use. The world has increasing shades of gray, and the philosophical issues center on the nature of law, justice and the place of superhumans in society -- is vigilantism legal? Can I risk having loved ones? What do you do when the courts don't work? While we have the power to overthrow a tyrant (conquer the world, stop environmentally dangerous corporations, etc.), do we have the authority? Am I even still human?

Realistic games are best compared to the darker games on the market -- *Cyberpunk, Shadowrun,* or the *World of Darkness* -- and anyone who enjoys those will quickly acclimate to a realistic supers setting. Once past a certain point you're no longer in a Supers story -- it's a [noir](#) game with super-powers (just as past a certain point it's not supers but high-powered epic fantasy).

Realistic stories range from Frank Miller's runs on *Batman* and *Daredevil* (produced because no one would publish the

crime comics he wanted to write) where the heroes are hard boiled and the opponents are criminals rather than super-villains; to Alan Moore's *Miracleman/Marvelman,* where the superhumans end up ruling the world, or Warren Ellis' *Authority,* where they simply stand above it, as the ultimate aspect of their superhuman responsibility. Many runs of various Spider-Man titles are realistic, with the character's emphasis on responsibility of power, but he tends to his most realistic when facing real-world problems such the flood of cheap handguns or drugs.

Tracking the Tropes For Your Troupe

Many of the classic comics tropes like secret identities, sidekicks and romance and so on thrive towards the center and die at the ends of the chart. In a pure fantasy game the hero is not likely to need a secret identity; in a pure realism game he couldn't maintain one. In a pure adventure game things like romantic entanglements are functionally sidelined in the focus on the conflict, while in pure wonder games the returning cast is limited to the PCs and romances end when the heroes move on. Purely fantastic sidekicks are equal partners, purely realistic sidekicks are child mortality statistics.

This makes sense, because the closer you are to the center of the graph, the closer you are to the general concept of what a comic book super *is.* Everyone casually familiar with super-heroes knows that they have secret identities, kid sidekicks and snoopy girlfriends. For these potential players, the center of the graph is a fine place to start.

Once you hit marginal familiarity -- the territory occupied by most gamers -- things reverse. The comics that generate buzz, and therefore get handed off to friends, are the ones at the edge. The stories that reside at the exact center of the chart are just the same old thing, even if that thing is the foundation on which the edge stories are built. To people only familiar with the edge stories, the classic tropes aren't comfortably expected or nostalgically charming, but instead the stupid things that *good* comics have moved away from. Expect such players to avoid these tropes themselves, and perhaps sabotage them when they appear in the game -- the supers equivalent of someone arguing why Bond gets captured and told the plot rather than shot.

One interesting realization about the industry is that most heroes end up averaging to the center of the graph over time: dark avengers start out with moderately realistic adventures, then discover wondrous secret worlds before gaining sidekicks, magical imps & primary color costumes. Eventually they find themselves in gritty mystery stories with psychopathic foes while still working with a team whose base resides in the asteroid belt. It is the nature of new writers to bring in new points of view, the curse of the editor to mimic whatever's hot in the market and the dream of the publisher to team them up and cross them all together. This means that if you have time the same game and team could satisfy all of the disparate players -- assuming you hold their interests for that long.

EXAMPLE: A Fantastic Reality -- the Omniman Story

Cliff Craddock was a normal boy until the day an explosion destroyed a field near his parent's farm. Cliff and his dog, Ruff, were the only witnesses. They quickly learned that the blast, attributed to a meteor, had changed them into the sorts of Firestorm Effects Cliff had read about. While he considered super-heroics, fear of public reaction kept the now uncannily bright 12-year old from revealing his identity. He instead designed costumes and masks too hide their identity when they did use their powers.

Public opinion against FEs had started thawing by Cliff's adulthood. Moving to Spire City, he took a job as a construction worker and began to act as Omniman. Omniman perfectly captured the spirit of Spire City, with its heartland roots, optimistic can-do heart, and eyes on the future. For six years he battled the mob and stopped disasters, and his actions changed the way America viewed the super-human. During this time he was aided and occasionally tested by a shadowy individual calling himself the Avuncular, whose presence was, at first, more aid than a hindrance. Once organized crime was reigned in, Cliff started toward an architecture degree and Spire City began facing larger threats. What followed were years of adventures where Omniman managed to make FE monsters and giant robots Fun.

It also led to the appearance of the Omniman Family.

The family started when Cliff's sister, Clara (perky and 12 years his junior) brought Ruff to live with Cliff in the city. The siblings learned that when they touched, Clara gained omni-powers for a day. Clara was such a snoop and trouble magnet that it was easier for Cliff to give her powers as soon as she turned up, and even then she'd still require rescuing. When she brought along her cat, Iota, it gained powers too! Omnilass and Omnipuss became good at rooting out secrets and minor crime, inevitably discovering larger plots that required her brother's help to resolve.

When the Avuncular appeared again with more stringent tests, things got stranger: the Avuncular created a team-up between Cliff and his 12-year old self. Omnilad (with Omnipup!) worked with Omniman and Omnidog to outwit the hyper-menace, but after that Omnilad and Omnipup would occasionally turn up unbidden, and Cliff could summon his younger self for aid. Plus, there is at least one incident of Omnilass & Omnipuss alongside Omniweelass (and Omnikit!), which Cliff would rather not remember.

At college Cliff befriended Prof. Beauford Blast, a genius with a recently developed flair for dangerous scientific discoveries, but whose gadgets then helped save the day. (To complicate things, Omnilass developed a crush on poor stammering, middle-aged Beauford.) Riding herd over this clan is Captain Lisa Quincy of the Spire City PD: she's been Omniman's liaison and nominal superior since he was deputized. Hints of romance between them are rapidly dragged behind the barn and shot.

After years of escapades, Beauford made a discovery about the nature of hyper-real isotopes (Brobdignagium et.al.) with repercussions on our hero. Such artifacts are intrusions from a higher level of reality . . . and so is Omniman! That explosion was not a meteor strike, but a rip into higher reality which permanently altered young Craddock. Omniman's array of powers all stems from this hyper-reality and his ability to extend it to other things on contact. Toddler Clara hadn't been altered by the explosion to mimic the Omni-powers -- Cliff was transferring some to protect her, just as he could do to anyone (and had been doing to Ruff, and even Professor Blast, with whom he shared Omni-intellect). His super-breath was making the air hyper-real and hence more solid, his apparent flight was just changing the solidity of the air around him to control his jump path or provide a base for "levitation," and his impossible feats of strength, such as lifting whole buildings, worked because his touch was making the building stronger to resist material stresses.

Armed with this knowledge, Omniman became even more formidable, and faced greater challenges and a darkening Avuncular. As he experimented with his "new" powers he pushed away his "family" for their protection and eschewed summoning his younger self for fear of playing into the Avuncular's hands. The discovery left Cliff depressed, as the world seemed a darker, more harshly scientific place. After years of adventures in relative social isolation, Cliff has overcome his fears and decided that whatever his power's origin, he'll face life's challenges alongside his family and his past, and to find out more about what their place in the world really is. He has also become the public face of a league of heroic Firestorm Effects, who as a team possess earth-shaking power. This might have been the Avuncular's goal all along.

This does raise questions about the Avuncular, and the method being used to contact his younger self through time. One theory is that the Avuncular is Omniman's future self, and these tests are preparing him for some upcoming crisis. Another is that the Avuncular is a resident of hyper-reality whose goal is personal amusement. A third is the idea that the Avuncular is actually Omniman's controlling force in the higher reality, which sees this world as a simple fiction. Cliff sees all of them as being equally likely, while the Avuncular remains as capricious and potent as ever.

Tri-Stat dX Stats

Omniman   *280 points*

Body 8, **Mind** (7) 15, **Soul** 11
ACV 12 **DCV** 9 **Health** 95

> ### Jumping in Tri-Stat
>
> Rather than the current

Characteristic Attributes

Attack Mastery (1) Lots of heroic combat experience.
Divine Relationship (1) Reroll 1 roll per session due to never-say-die attitude
Features (1) Reliable voice
Organizational Ties (2) Official ties w. Spire City PD

Power Attributes

Armor (8) ignore first 80 points of damage per attack
Enhanced Mind (8) his intellect is hyper-real, but is less capable in Savvy (no bonus)
Super-Strength (8) lift 1,000 tons, +80 to damage
Jumping (6) cover 20 km/leap, 2km/round (appx 1000 kph) (speed 4, distance+2)
Special Defense (6) needs limited O2 /Disease immune/Poison immune/slow aging
Tunneling (6) tunnel at 5 kph (20m/turn)
Immovability (2) Resist 40 knockback
Duplication (11) Proportional w/o duplication, 50% -- young self; Reduction: 1 dupe (-2)
Servant (8) 40% of total (112 points) -- pet collie, Omnidog
Dynamic Powers (4) Hyper Reality -- can make self & things more "real" w/touch for 1 day

- *Transfer (4)* Can transfer 4 levels all Powers except Dynamic Powers to 1 target
- *Special Attack (1)* Super Breath -- 20 dam, knockback, spreading, short range, low penetration
- *Special Attack (2)* Icy Super-breath -- 20 health of Tangle, no damage, short range
- *Flight (1)* Used to hover or change direction in Jump (Body roll required).

Defects

Skeleton in closet (2) Secret ID
Unreliable Power (2) Duplicate appears at GM whim or with Soul check at -4
SO -- Sister (2).
Nemesis (2) The Avuncular.
Achilles Heel (1) Hyper-reality attacks, lose x2 normal health

Skills

Architecture (3) Skyscrapers
Area Knowledge (1) Spire City
Cultural Arts (1) art deco
Etiquette (1) Midwest America
Languages (3) languages of Spire City's immigrants
Physical Science (1) Hyper-reality theory
Power Usage (2) Dynamic Powers
Unarmed Attack (1) Strikes

Jumping guidelines (a running jump covers 1/4 your kph in meters, and you can reach 4-5kph per point of Body), consider setting the maximum horizontal leap at X in meters (X= the maximum allowed Body stat) and applying the mechanic posited in ["A Strangeness of Apes"](#) to jumping distances. In a d10 supers game, a 20m leap would be Practically Impossible, 10m is Easy and 1m is Practically Guaranteed. This also gives a quick-and-dirty distance calculator to which you can apply the multiple from the Jumping power. (An even faster solution is saying that a running jump covers Body in meters.) The bonus from Superstrength should apply to these Jumping rolls.

The existing Jumping power divorces distance from velocity, linking the latter to the character's ground move rate. This made Omniman's supersonic leaps but lack of super-speed difficult. Hence, the 2 point level of Jumping, which assumes the character covers his entire distance in 1 round. For velocity purposes, use the Medium progression chart, starting at 50kph for level 1. Yes, this is faster than flight, but it's less versatile, and someone leaping continuously for an hour looks pretty silly.

You can also stack 1 point Jumping onto 2 point levels, indicating that the character can make leaps of longer than one round at the 2 point speed, Omniman's has 4 levels at the 2 point cost (moving at 1000 kph) and 2 additional levels at 1 point, which maxes out to roughly 10 rounds in the air per

Characters Over Time

Omniman's history is designed to showcase changes in a super hero's position on the story style graph. His early years were highly Adventurous with a strong streak of the Fantastic, fighting gangsters and the occasional threatening foe, with no real questions asked about how the world worked or why. With the arrival of the Omniman Family these tales moved towards the center of the Adventure/Wonder axis -- romantic entanglements, secret identity -- without losing any Fantasy -- giant robots, a meddling super-sister and super-dog and a mad scientist friend.

The codification of his powers around a single theory marked a shift from Fantasy into Realism, where he is occasionally at odds with the police and is exposed to what happens when his hyper-reality meets the real (i.e., the real gets crushed and Cliff gets guilt). At the same time, this single power theory gave him a lot of opportunity for power exploration. His latest phase moves him back towards the center of the Fantasy/Realism axis and further towards the Wonder end of the Adventure/Wonder chart, with the Ominman Family discovering strange pockets of hyper-reality and visiting lost worlds while still countering disasters and fighting the occasional crime.

All longstanding published characters go through these sorts of changes combining the best elements of creating a new character and sticking with an old one while giving the world a feeling of change and producing history that can be mined for new story ideas. Even if you aren't going to run the game long enough to cover several shifts, writing them into your hero's history is worth a little omni-thought.

The Trappings of Technology

Enchantment for Low Fantasy and Techno-Magic for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Demi Benson

"Low fantasy magic is less a source of wonder than a toolkit."
--William H. Stoddard, *GURPS Fantasy*

GURPS Magic has good rules for emulating the flavor of high fantasy enchantment -- powerful enchantments take years of effort by wizards of legendary skill and the results remain perfectly powerful forever. However, that may not fit the feel of a low fantasy or techno-magic world where magic is a de facto technology. One way to easily distinguish magic from technology is: technological machines break down and wear out, magic doesn't.

If magic items last forever, as in standard high fantasy, the world should be inundated with the remains of apprentices' first Staffs, cheap Fireball wands, minorly enchanted swords, and scads of Powerstones, Purify Water hoops, Measurement gizmos, and Umbrella cloak-pins. If there is a chance the next band of adventurers wandering through town will have some ancient loot that matches close enough, there would be little impetus to order a new device and wait months or years for delivery. In such a world, magic items aren't technology, they're luxuries -- locking devices up in a vault increases the value, especially if everyone takes theirs out of circulation.

To adapt the *GURPS* enchantment system to better fit a low fantasy paradigm, we have to make some changes in how enchantment works. Mostly what we do is add options to allow for less powerful, even feeble, magic. The default *GURPS* enchantment system is compatible with the following rules and the two systems may co-exist in the game world.

Conventions Used in this Article

- To distinguish the robustness of an enchantment, referred to as Power in *GURPS Magic* (see *Power of a Magic Item,* page 17), from the Power Enchantment (page 57) this article will use the term Maximum Endurance for the former.
- An item's Current Endurance is exactly analogous to the Spell Endurance of temporary and lasting spells (see *Spell Endurance,* page 10).
- Effective Skill is the same as explained in *Magic,* page 17.
- References to "the item" should be understood to mean a single enchantment upon a magical object, which may itself have multiple enchantments. "Device" refers to the physical object or area that carries an enchantment.

Creating the Enchantment

Why do the default rules require a skill of 15 to enchant? There is never any justification given. For low fantasy, allowing unskilled enchanters to produce ramshackle work fits the genre -- items are more likely to be made by Peter the Journeyman Enchanter than the High Elven Council of Wizards.

1. There is no minimum skill level for enchanting. How else should a mage get experience in Enchant if not by using it? If the casting was a success, the item will work, regardless of skill level (but see *Current Endurance, Resistance, Aging, and Activation* below).
   a. There is no minimum level for leading a circle of enchanters. The same penalties apply -- a -1 to Effective Skill per assistant, and -1 for other people nearby (see page 17) -- but Effective Skill may be as low as the leader is willing to risk.

b. For assisting a Quick & Dirty enchantment, the Effective Skill is the lowest Effective Skill of all involved. Penalties are subtracted from the leader's skill level.

2. No minimum Endurance level for created items. A cheap item may deliberately have Endurance less than 15 or the enchanter may not yet be skilled enough to produce better work.

3. An item's initial Endurance level is set to its Maximum Endurance. Current Endurance can always go down and can be boosted back to its starting level with the right spell (see Repair Enchantment under *New Enchantment Spells* below), but you can't make a weak item into a strong item.

Current Endurance, Resistance, Aging, and Activation

These are the changes that give magic items the veneer of technology -- being worn down through use and age.

1. An item's Current Endurance is used when resisting other spells.
2. Items need to roll vs. their Current Endurance once per year to avoid aging, unless under the effect of Slumbering Enchantment (see *New Enchantment Spells* below).
   a. A success by 1 or more means the item is unaffected by aging for this year.
   b. A success by 0 means the item has gained a temporary quirk, which may be removed when the enchantment is repaired.
   c. On failure, the item loses one level of Current Endurance.
   d. On critical failure, it loses one level each of Current and Maximum Endurance and gains a permanent quirk.
3. If an item's Current Endurance drops to 0, the enchantment is lost.
   a. At the GM's option, a leveled enchantment, such as Accuracy, may instead lose one level of enchantment. The reduced enchantment then has a Current and Maximum Endurance equal to the previous Maximum Endurance.
4. All items with an active ability -- casting a spell, performing a function on a target -- have an activation roll equal to their Current Endurance. If the activation roll fails, treat this as a regular spell failure.
   a. An activation failure may be retried after the spell's normal casting time. e.g. an Alarm item could try again every second until it succeeds, a Turn Blade bracelet could only try against a single attack per turn, a Glued area would try once per person per hex.
   b. Items without any active effect -- such as many armor and weapon enchantments, Tangle Growth, a Fireproofed area -- never make an activation roll.
   c. To introduce this rule to an ongoing game, the GM may decide that an item with a Power of 15 or higher does not need to roll. This will allow preexisting items to be used as-is.
5. An item with Power of 2 or lower stops working completely (but still needs to make yearly aging rolls). It retains an aura of enchantment and it can be repaired back to full strength with the proper spell (see Repair Enchantment under *New Enchantment Spells* below).

Improvements -- Skill, Energy, and Endurance

Enchanters may fine-tune Effective Skill, energy cost to create, and Maximum Endurance to suit their needs. An unskilled mage with extra available power could use Energy for Skill to raise his Effective Skill, while a highly skilled mage may use Skill for Energy to quickly finish an item. Obviously, Energy for Skill and Skill for Energy may not both be used together.

1. **Tradeoff: Energy for Skill** works as normal (see *Ceremonial Magic,* page 12). The tradeoff is: +1 for an excess of 20% energy, +2 for for 40%, +3 for 60%, +4 for 100%, and a further +1 for each further 100% energy. This is the only way to raise Maximum Endurance level above a caster's normal Effective Skill level.
2. **Tradeoff: Skill for Energy.** Mages may double the effective energy being channeled into an enchantment by taking a -4 penalty to Effective

So How Long Does It Take?

Items with high Endurance are unlikely to fail the aging roll. Anything with an Endurance of 16 or higher will regular fail on a roll of 17 and critical fail on an 18. An item with Maximum Endurance of 20 will be reduced to a Current Power of 15 (the lowest of high-priced magic) in between 150 and 390

Skill (and therefore also to Maximum Endurance level). Triple energy for -8, and quadruple for -12. Yes, this means that high-energy, short-lived items can be created very quickly. The actual tradeoff is as follows: -1 to skill gives +25% energy; -2 gives +50%; -3 gives +75%; -4 gives +100%; these are additive.

3. **Tradeoff: Power for Skill.** An enchanter may get a bonus to Effective Skill (+1, +2, etc.) by taking the same size penalty to an item's final Power level (-1, -2, etc.); e.g. a caster with effective skill 14 may increase his Effective Skill by +4 (to 18) by taking a -4 penalty to the item's Maximum Endurance (it will have Maximum Endurance of 10). This makes lower-power items a virtual success for highly skilled enchanters.

Example: Arenka is a journeyman enchanter making Alarm baubles. She has a 12 in Enchant and a 14 in Alarm, for an Effective Skill of 12. Since she's practicing, she wants to spend little time on this project -- she puts in only minimal effort to ensure the result lasts a long time. The Alarm enchantment costs 60 energy so Arenka enlists the help of an apprentice named Gil (Effective Skill of 11). Arenka decides to speed up the process by trading Skill for Energy at -3 for +75% energy. This brings the energy cost down -- 60 / 1.75 = 34.3, rouded up to 35 -- and her Effective Skill to 8. Then she decide to improve the odds by trading Power for Skill at +/- 2, boosting her skill roll to 10. Arenka and Gil spend the hour enchanting, and she makes the roll dead on. Arenka spends 10 FP and 9 points from her Powerstone and Gil spends 10 FP and 8 points from a borrowed Powerstone. The new item has a Maximum Endurance of 6, and probably won't last more than five years.

years with an average of 270 years; each level averages 54 years between reductions. Maybe the long maintenance interval is why high-power wizards enchant up to 20 Endurance when they can. A reduction from 15 (a decent Endurance for a pricey item) to 10 (barely suitable for adventurers) would be between 21 and 69 years, averaging 45. On the downward slide, a reduction from Endurance 10 to 5 (a nearly useless item) would be between 5 and 9 years, averaging 7.

Critical failures do not affect these numbers, although they will reduce how well the item can be repaired.

Offsetting Penalties

Enchantment using an appropriately tuned magic crystal can offset a caster's enchantment penalties. A +1 crystal is quite common, a +2 is somewhat common, a +3 is hard to find, and +4 or higher is very rare. These will not increase an item's Maximum Endurance, but will allow penalties to be negated. See Attune Crystal, below.

A possible source of crystals is the Crystal Fields, from "Aulos -- City in the Sky" where the crystals are specifically mentioned to be harvested as magical adjuncts.

For examples of crystals and gemstones with some notes on their historic associations, see "Appendix Z: Shiny! -- Random Gemstone Table."

The article "Magic Ingredients Revisited -- Spell Ingredients for *GURPS*" lists ingredients by college; many include gemstones or crystals.

Optional Rule: Wizard War

By allowing Linking spells to be used with Missile spells (contrary to page 131), and allowing those Links to be used in Temporary Enchantments (page 56), Spell Stones (page 60), or Spell Arrows (page 65), magic-based bombs, missiles, mines, and grenades can be created. Because a single-use Temporary Enchantment costs only 15% of the usual amount, they may be created quite cheaply.

Optional Rule for "Unlimited Mana"

For Slow and Sure enchantment, mages may put any amount of energy into an enchantment every day. Putting in the

default Recovery Rate amount (8 points) every day is the minimum to qualify as a professional enchanter. A master enchanter could put in far more.

For any type of enchantment, if Threshold is exceeded at any time during casting, in addition to regular Calamity Table effects the caster must immediately roll vs. his adjusted Enchant skill level -- any failure means the enchantment has *failed completely* and the caster must start over from the very beginning; a success means the item is only quirked (severity depends on how much Thresh was exceeded), a critical success means no negative effects happen this time.

This option will greatly reduce the price per point of energy for enchantment (by a factor of at least 8).

New Enchantment Spells

Repair Enchantment

Enchantment

Allows the target enchantment's Current Endurance to be repaired by 1 level per casting, up to the enchantment's Maximum Endurance. The caster must know the spell being enchanted at 10 or higher; effective skill level is the lower of Repair Enchantment and the target spell.

If the caster is not repairing a power level, then temporary quirks (but not permanent ones) can be removed at base skill but reduced energy and casting time; the caster must know which quirk is targeted for removal (for example, by a previous use of Analyze Magic, or by discovering the quirk through use). Quirks can be removed at the same time as repairing a power level for no extra energy by taking a -2 to skill, or at no penalty but energy cost +25%.

The caster is at +1 to skill for every 2 full levels of base skill above the enchantment's Current Endurance, and at -1 for every level of base skill below the enchantment's Current Endurance.

Area enchantments may be repaired as the entire original area at once. If a smaller area is repaired, from then on that smaller area is considered a separate enchantment.

Duration: Permanent

Energy Cost: 1/20 the target enchantment's energy cost, with a further x1/4 if only a temporary quirk is being removed and no power levels are being repaired. This cost is not reduced for high skill. Minimum cost is 1 point.

Time to Cast: One minute per point of energy cost, or the casting time of the target enchantment's basic spell, if it has one, whichever is greater. Minimum casting time is 1 minute.

Prerequisites: Enchant 10+, target enchantment 10+

Age Enchantment

Enchantment

Forces an immediate aging roll for a target enchantment if the target fails a Resistance roll versus this spell.

The GM may change the prerequisite of Remove Enchantment to this spell.

Duration: Instantaneous

Cost: 10 or 1/100 of the cost to place the enchantment originally, whichever is more.

Time to cast: 1 minute

Prerequisite: Enchant

Attune Crystal

Enchantment

This spell prepares a crystal or gemstone to efficiently channel the magical energies of enchantment. Most such crystals will be of low quality (providing a penalty offset of +1 or +2), limited in ability (to one College or one spell), or both.

A crystal capable of being used in any enchantment and with a penalty offset of +1 would be worth $50; quadruple price for each additional +1 (i.e. $200 for +2, $800 for +3, $3200 for +4). Price for a limited crystal is x0.8 for a single-college, and x0.4 for a single group of spells. Price savings are not great because the sellers can usually find someone who wants that specific type. However, prices are subject to considerable differences based on supply and demand.

Cost: 30 for a penalty offset of +1, double for each additional +1 (i.e. 60 for +2, 120 for +3, 240 for +4). Cost is x1/2 for a crystal that only affects spells of a single magical College (e.g. Fire spells); and x1/3 for a crystal tuned to affect a single spell and close derivatives (e.g. Fireball/Explosive Fireball, Light/Continual Light/Shape Light). This may be recast as per Accuracy as long as the crystal's quality is suitable to hold a higher attunement.

Prerequisite: Enchant

Selling Price	+1	+2	+3	+4
All Spells	$50	$200	$800	$3200
Single College	$40	$160	$640	$2560
Single Spell	$20	$80	$320	$1280
Casting Cost	+1	+2	+3	+4
All Spells	30	60	120	240
Single College	15	30	60	120
Single Spell	10	20	40	80

Slumbering Enchantment

Enchantment

As Suspend Enchantment, this spell deactivates an enchantment, allowing it to be stored without requiring yearly aging rolls. Use the modifier from Suspend Enchantment (page 58) for attempts to study or detect slumbering enchantments.

When cast as a spell, this must be cast on each enchantment individually. Slumbering Enchantment must win a Quick Contest against the target's Current Endurance. If this fails, the mage pays full energy cost, but may immediately try again.

When enchanted into a device, the caster sets a time interval. If the device has not been used for a period equal to the time interval, Slumbering Enchantment will attempt to deactivate all enchantments in the device -- only an uncontested activation roll is needed. If the activation roll fails, Slumbering Enchantment will attempt activation after another time interval has passed. Slumbering Enchantment may also be triggered by a user to attempt deactivation immediately.

As an enchantment, this spell also deactivates itself -- aging rolls are only made if the device is not yet slumbering.

Duration: Permanent until Awakened

Cost: If cast as a spell, 10 or 1/100 of the cost to place the enchantment originally, whichever is more. As an enchantment, cost is 40 or 1/50 of the cost to place all the affected enchantments originally, whichever is more.

Time to cast: see *Enchanting* (page 16)

Prerequisite: Suspend Enchantment

Awaken Enchantment

Enchantment

This reactivates a suspended or slumbering enchantment. Against Suspend Enchantment, this spell must win a Quick Contest. Against Slumbering Enchantment, only a regular success roll is needed.

Duration: Instantaneous

Cost: 4 or 1/10 the cost of the spell to be overcome, whichever is greater.

Time to cast: see *Enchanting* (page 16)

Prerequisites: Enchant and Detect Magic

What to do without Awaken Enchantment?

As GM, you decide to introduce these rules to your ongoing game. Obviously, none of the PCs will know Awaken Enchantment. What should your hardy adventurers do if they find a cache of slumbering magical goodies, but no one knows how to wake them? To fit with fantasy tropes, the solution should be available to even the magically ungifted: Impose their will upon the object and reawaken its quiescent magic.

The PC must win a Quick Contest of Will versus the Slumbering Enchantment's Current Endurance each day for a number of days equal to the activation cost. Every 10 character points in magical advantages (GM's call, although Magery certainly counts) gives a +1 bonus to Will, as does having any points in either Enchant or Detect Magic. In Low Mana regions, there is a -5 penalty. A regular success adds one day to the total, while a regular failure adds nothing. A critical success immediately activates the item. A critical failure means the PC can never overcome that particular enchantment unless he increases his adjusted Will and tries again from the start.

The character need not realize that the device is enchanted, but must use, wear, or study it and must believe that it is special -- believing a sword is well-made and worthy of a hero would allow a Will roll, but pocketing a pretty ring just because it's pretty would not. If the character is not actively attempting to awaken the item, the GM may roll in secret. As success draws near, the GM may give the PC hints of its true power or feelings of immanent comprehension -- "Every night after work you've gazed upon the strange statuette, wondering who made it. Every night you feel closer to understanding why the grotesque figure reaches upwards. One night understanding comes to you in a dream . . . but as you wake, the dream fades and with it your understanding."

Each character may attempt to mentally overcome only one Slumbering Enchantment at a time.

Example: A group of adventurers have explored The Lost City of the Ancients and discovered a hidden trove of items. Suspecting the items are magical, Sasha the Wise casts Detect Magic on an amulet (at a -5 penalty as per page 58) and finds a glimmer of magic. Curious, Sasha keeps the amulet with her and spends many of her free hours wondering what it does. Every night the GM rolls the Slumbering Enchantment's Current Endurance (a 12) versus Sasha's Will (a 14) plus +3 for Magery 2 and points in Detect Magic (an adjusted Will of 17). The amulet has only one small spell in it, and Slumbering Enchantment was cast as a spell for 10 energy. Sasha fails three times and succeeds ten times -- after nearly two weeks, the amulet awakens and she notices that the enchantment seems stronger and easier to analyze.

Meanwhile, her companion Ragnar the Barbarian found an excellent sword, which he declared worthy of a hero such as himself. Ragnar does not believe or care that it is enchanted, but he keeps the sword with him at all times and is very proud of it. The ancient sword has Penetrating Weapon 3, Accuracy +2, Puissance +1, and Shatterproof for a cost of 2400 energy; the Slumbering Enchantment cost 48 energy and has a Current Endurance of 13. Ragnar's Will of 11 has only a slim chance of success every day -- most days the roll fails. The GM doesn't want to roll every single day's contest, and decides that since Ragnar isn't actively trying to awaken the sword, there is no chance of critical success or failure: timeframe is the number of energy points divided by the odds of success -- Ragnar will awaken the sword in 474 days.

The Six Cursed Rings of Jose Von Lee

by Elizabeth McCoy

Jose Von Lee (replace the name with one more suitable to the campaign -- or not) was an antisocial old blighter of an enchanter. He was the sort of person voted Most Likely To Become A Lich, despite having no evidence of necromantic activity. And when he died, his traditional tower lay untouched for some years before the town decided that they needed the money more than they feared what he might have left behind.

So they sent in low-life to fetch out things, boxed them up, and auctioned them off . . .

Jose Von Lee's Six Cursed Rings

No one in Von Lee's town has tried these on, since they *know* what the old crank was like. He was the sort to laugh and point when squirrels were drowning in wells, or cats fell in lakes. (Heck, he was the sort to push small furry animals into bodies of water.)

Surprisingly, none of his assortment of enchanted rings were actually cursed in the sense of being unable to remove them once on. Perhaps Jose Von Lee *liked* some of the odder ones, as entertainment. Perhaps he just didn't feel like spending the time on a curse unless someone was going to buy it. Of course, subsequent owners might make some additions.

All the rings are plain gold bands (unless the GM decides otherwise) which will fit perfectly on any finger, from tiny sylph to giant dragon.

The Ring of Handsome Bloke. This ring turns the owner into a very attractive young man (no matter what the prior gender or age was), of average strength, who is just a tad dim. Perhaps Von Lee used it in his aging years to shift things around, and didn't feel like being clever. Perhaps that's just a side effect. Perhaps some foolish traveler banged on his tower door some dark night, and was never heard from again . . .

(*GURPS* stats: ST 10, DX 11, IQ 9, HT 12; Handsome Appearance. The character may wear the ring indefinitely, with these stats, but must still make Aging rolls normally; eventually, though in the prime of health, he will drop dead from old age. He is also not immune to diseases which do not permanently affect stats; an old crone with the flu can wear the ring to be a young bloke with the flu. And, as a final note, clothing does not change; don't wear this if you're not naturally about six feet tall.)

The Ring of Too Short To Touch The Ground. This ring shrinks the owner by two inches -- upward. On the plus side, the air above the ground apparently has perfect traction in all conditions (ice, snow, mud), and the user does not leave footprints or trigger weight-related traps. (Even if lying down, the person is still not going to actually touch any surface he's "on top of.") On the minus side, he must roll up his pants, since that's where the shrinkage occurs. On the potentially annoying side, the effect lasts only 30 minutes, and the ring must be taken off for five minutes before the effect will resume. If it's left on, it will re-activate itself after 30 minutes.

The Ring of Peeping Tom. This would be a garden-variety Ring of Invisibility if it didn't also include the ability to see through wood and fabric. On the minus side, the user sees through wood and fabric as if they were not there -- which can cause the wearer to bump into trees, and perhaps view far too much of other humans who are *not* considered attractive in his eyes.

The Ring of Disease Resistance. Sadly, it's not. It just feels as if one no longer has the flu, cold, terminal cancer, or whatever else is afflicting the wearer. This persists for an hour after taking off the ring, too! However, since the wearer will probably not be sensible enough to spend time in bed, resting, or otherwise treating the symptoms . . . Appropriate penalties to health-based rolls should be made (e.g., -2 to HT rolls, in *GURPS*). If the wearer does not take off the

ring, it will stop working anyway a week later, and require a "cool-down" of two days before it will work on that person again.

The Ring of Virility. There are other, more pornographic, terms for this ring, possibly including "The Ring of Indefinite Magazine Reading." Essentially, so long as the user is wearing the ring, all abilities pertaining to arousal and functionality (for either gender) will work indefinitely. On the useful side, it provides a mild bonus to rolls relating to extended labor of any sort (e.g., +2 to HT in *GURPS*). On the minus side, lecherous characters may never want to take it off, despite the inconvenient physical side effects.

The Ring of Dainty Lass. Whether Von Lee wore this for his own amusement, or hired others to do so . . . is something the townsfolk would rather not know, thanks. The enchantment is much like that of the Ring of Handsome Bloke, transforming the wearer into a lovely young slip of a girl, approximately five feet tall (with three-foot long hair), with good agility and adequate intelligence. Happily, Von Lee's tastes did not run into bosoms the size of watermelons, and back pain is not an issue.

(*GURPS* stats for the Dainty Lass: ST 7, DX 12, IQ 11, HT 12; Beautiful Appearance. The same notes as the Ring of Handsome Bloke's apply.)

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

If Ignorance Is Bliss, I'm Happy More Often Than Not

Every so often I find myself in a pinch. I've agreed to run a game for a certain system, but . . . well, I've never gotten around to actually *reading* everything I was supposed to before the session. (Sure, this means I didn't make up an adventure either, but I tend not to do that under many other circumstances, so we're not going to let that affect our conversation here.) Maybe it's a new game and I haven't actually gotten much past the introductory piece at the beginning; maybe it's a con game or a pick-up session somewhere; maybe it's the first game of a whole campaign, and I fully intend to read that information some day.

Whatever the reason, I've found myself in a number of situations where I need to run an adventure in circumstances that are less than ideal. So how do I handle such crises?

If you answered "curl up in a ball and wait for the scary gamers to leave," you'd only be correct about 20% of the time.

No, most of the rest of the time I make up an adventure, subplot, or catalyst that plays to my strengths and minimizes the effects of my ignorance. And, without exception (that I can remember), the players seem to gobble it up. And so, without further adieu, here are some of the techniques I've used when I haven't sunk enough skill points into the game I'm about to run.

"You wake up in a prison . . ." I've written about this [before](#) (and so have [others](#)). Basically, starting the players out in a tightly controlled circumstance is a great way to keep them from doing too much that's unexpected. Of course, "prison" can have a number of different meanings; it could be a literal Alcatraz-type setting, a *Prisoner*-style idyllic village, an alternate dimension, or what have you. Regardless, the desire to escape forms a great narrative pull for the rest of the adventure. And, since the rules of reality often don't apply (depending on the prison), the players tend to be a fair bit more forgiving of rules lapses, mistakes, or oversights that might occur.

Also, "prison" might refer to any tightly controlled environment, even if the heroes seem to have a fair bit of freedom. For example, a **Fading Suns** campaign has tons of information that needs to be assimilated before it can be presented fully; however, it might be possible to read enough information to run an adventure set on a train going from one city to another, which should greatly reduce the amount you need to read.

"When suddenly, you're powerless!" If you've got a grip on the setting but aren't so sure about how the various powers work and/or fit into the larger whole, it might be possible to have everyone end up without their snazzy powers for the adventure. Again, the players can just wake up that way (creating a mystery they will most definitely want to solve), they may encounter a threat early on that de-powers them, or they may be placed in a situation where their powers don't work as expected (again, the ever-popular other dimension).

This technique can be used to varying degrees. For example, if you're playing a **Shadowrun/Cyberpunk**-type game but you're not familar with the netrunning rules, then you can simply de-power that aspect; maybe there's a net-space surge that's disrupting all netrunning activities for the next few days or so, and you can look suitably horrified if any players start insisting that they attempt to enter this other-place.

"Gee, Mister . . . what's a vampire?" As an *excellent* technique if you're starting a game with players who are more experienced with you, consider introducing some character or aspect that needs to be brought up to speed. Trust me: You'll never play a more convincing ignorant person.

For example, if you're playing **Werewolf,** maybe the PCs encounter a newly transformed cub, and need to bring him up to speed about their furry ways before he gets himself (and the rest of the party) into trouble. Or, again, if you're playing that **Shadowrun**-type game, maybe the PCs are given a good sum of money to lug around the nephew of Mr. Johnson to teach him the basics of what it is to be a shadowrunner.

This is a slightly more dangerous technique than some of the others, since the PCs may not have a compelling reason to take the neophyte under their wings. Making sure the newbie NPC has some advantageous aspect to warrant

keeping him around can be a useful idea; really, this is the basic idea behind *The Fifth Element,* one of the most gorgeous music videos ever produced. Regardless, making sure the person's cluelessness doesn't become cloying or annoying is also important; if the character ends up like Scrappy Doo, you're basically begging the players to toss him to the first minion of darkness they encounter.

Of course, any of the techniques above can be mixed and matched; it's quite likely to end up in a prison without powers, and if you happen to encounter someone who's of a similar mindset to you but even more inexperienced, then the PCs might need to bring him up to speed at the same time they're trying to regain their abilities and escape.

Regardless, ignorance of a setting shouldn't necessarily be a detriment to running it; with the right idea, you can turn that ignorance into something the group will remember for a long time. And, remember: You'll never be as ignorant of the setting as you are that first time you run it . . . so enjoy the freedom from knowledge while it lasts.

Pyramid Review

Deliria: Faerie Tales for a New Millennium

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What grabs you first about *Deliria: Faerie Tales for a New Millennium* is its look. It is, in a word, eyecatching. Physically, *Deliria* is a breathtaking wash of color behind its glossy black cover. A chaotic array of styles and techniques are used to illustrate the book to an arresting effect. This really imparts the setting's sense of wonder and mercurial nature, from the whimsical and the magical to the dark and the dream-like. This continues with the writing, heavy on the "purple prose," works to pull the reader into a world and setting that is all of these things and more. A world woven of song, but enamored and maddened of mankind's cacophony; a world wherein the fey are as fascinated by us as much as we are of them.

That *Deliria: Faerie Tales for a New Millennium* is designed to be more than a game of hack 'n' slash is no surprise. The creation of Phil Brucato, the designer of the well-received *[Mage: the Ascension Revised Edition,](#)* this is a storytelling game focused on the modern and the adult faerie tale. It is mechanically light, designed to be card driven rather than diceless, feeling in tone like *[Nobilis](#)* than *[Amber,](#)* though not quite on a scale as grand as either of those.

Ostensibly a modern setting, *Deliria* is not just a game of the urban faerie tale. Certainly it encompasses that, starting in the world that we know and love, but it takes in classical fantasy elements also. These, though, are present only deep within Deliria itself, in turn described as a state of mind, a blending of elements, and a place in-between. It begins at the Crossways, which are passages between the mortal and faerie realms; these are usually a location but occasionally a time or person. Living either side is the Mysterium, an occult underground aware of both worlds. The mortals who live here are the twilight people, having been touched by the supernatural. Crossways often give access to Goblin Markets located within the Mysterium, places where mortals and the fey can do business. Beyond this lies Deliria, a world comprised of faerie dominions, faerie wastelands or Vashards, and the Altwald's primal forests. Notable dominions include the Oakmare School of Wizardry, contained within a single tree; Furnage, a Victorian-era city housed in a flying mountain; Gundermann Square, a faerie marketplace turned mall; and Wehir, a feudal idyll transformed into Disney-like garishness by jealousy and murder.

Although Deliria is governed by the old laws, meaning that most mortal technology will not work, it has had its influence. Many fey are fascinated by mortal devices, but the most obvious effect comes from the Internet. It manifests itself as bramble, a crystalvine kudzu that weaves it way parallel to the cable allowing mortal imagination to create its own dominions. On-line gamers have created realms of their own that ordinarily exist just on the computer screen, but *really* do in Deliria. This is where in Deliria that hack 'n' slash is possible.

Besides the twilight people, Deliria's inhabitants fall into three broad groups denoting power and status. The Aeldenfolk are natives, truly immortal; the long-lived Aelden are mortal faeries residing in both worlds; and Shimmerlings, child-like expressions of fey essence also appearing in both worlds. Each is defined by his Wishcraft (faerie magic), Graces (mental, physical, and spiritual attributes), Legacies (innate uncanny powers), Wyrds (mystical weaknesses), Guises (faerie roles), and Turnabout (ability to counter magic). Every fey must be designed, for *Deliria* has no faerie bestiary, but rather examines the powers and abilities that a fey could and does have. Guises are the core aid to any design, serving up roles traditional to the faerie tale such as the Aelf, the Fairy Godmother, the Muse, the Ogre, and the Sprite, along with the modern Alien and Chronopath. This is a toolkit for creating faeries that discusses faerie motives and natures and explains their powers and weaknesses, such as why iron is deadly to them.

This faerie creation toolkit is complemented by the advice on running a *Deliria* game, called "Circle" and "Saga." The latter is the campaign, the former is the playing group, which shares and creates the Saga. The aim is for Circle's members to run the Saga on a rotating basis. The advice excels when examining the faerie tale, its motif and elements, giving the reader a decent understanding of the genre. Nearby sidebars usefully list potential themes, hooks, settings, challenges, adversaries, and helpmeets (or useful allies). Both for the classic and the modern faerie tale, enabling a GM to cherrypick what he wants for the Saga or session.

Unfortunately, having been lead on a wild ride through a riotously imaginative world, it all comes to a crash with the crunch. Conceptually, the Compact System is designed to work at three levels of complexity: Narrative, Basic, and Advanced. The first is loose and light, focusing upon description, and intended for use in Live Action games. The second adds relative complexity and employs the game's card driven mechanic, while the third increases both the complexity and detail. The core mechanic uses an ordinary deck of cards, minus the King of Clubs, the King of Diamonds, and the two Jokers. In fact, it is suggested that each player and the GM have a deck to draw from. To test an ability in Narrative or Basic play, a player compares to a GM determined difficulty on a pass or fail basis. In Advanced play, or if a better result is required, then a card is drawn. A red card adds to the total, while a black is deducted. Face cards can guarantee automatic successes, failures, triumphs, or disasters.

This all sounds simple enough, yet as presented it is not. It is over written and over explained, and although trying to reflect the genre's inherent varying degree of luck, provides such a wide range of results (for this reviewer's tastes at least) that any result might as well *be* random. Further, as the intended degree of complexity increases, the actual feel of the complexity increases exponentially. The suggested alternative dice mechanic adheres to the same results that drawing cards would give, but feels fundamentally counter-intuitive. The conceptual cleverness continues with the combat system which focuses not on landing the blow, but its effect. It can apply as much to social and psychic situations as it does physical, with the desired amount of damage acting as the difficulty. Although weapon use can influence this, the results still default to the wildly random mechanics.

Character generation follows this pattern of conceptual artfulness and complex execution. The simpler of the two systems given has just three attributes (Body, Spirit, and Mind) and a handful of broad vocations or skills. The more advanced breaks each attribute into four aspects, and individual rather than broad skills. Although not complicated, the process is best explained in the example of character generation. The end result has some nice touches, like every character having to list three wishes that might come true, and "Deliria" being an attribute of its own. It reflects awareness of the faerie realm, but the higher it is, the more detached the character is from the mortal realm. Unfortunately, because its base is half the Mind attribute, the more intelligent a character is, the more detached he is. The aim, though, is the ordinary person possessing a few gifts and problems (it is possible to have a PC Aelden, but this is never addressed), who must learn to cope in the strangeness that is Deliria.

Surprisingly, the rules for magic and spellcasting manage to mix high concept with simple writing. It is perhaps too simple, but magic involves just will and how a character thinks magic works. Such methods as artisanship, faerie wishcraft (easier, faster than mortal magic), ritual, shamanism, and witchcraft are each covered in handy reference sheets. Still using the Compact System, the emphasis is on the storytelling aspects and effects whatever the type, and more methods could easily be created using the same model. This emphasis on storytelling runs throughout *Deliria: Faerie Tales for a New Millennium,* but only here is it effectively implemented.

In addition the game comes with a CD-ROM containing yet more material, from pieces of music, sample characters

and creatures, and a card draw program to advanced rules, an extensive bibliography, and the game's bible. This is all very fascinating, but the advanced rules just complicate things further. There is even a download available -- "The Compact Patch" available -- which answers some questions, but is not up to handling the game's central problem: a lack of clarity. Not clarity of vision, but mechanical clarity. In its present form, *Deliria* is not unplayable, but it has been made hard to play by the overwrought rules that match neither the setting, the writing, nor the feel of the game. This is not to say that they could not, but in its present form, the Compact System is a hindrance. This is a shame, because otherwise *Deliria* is beautifully realized with both writing and art matching the author's vision. Play the game purely for that vision -- and I would, because ***Deliria: Faerie Tales for a New Millennium*** is an arresting creation in search of mechanical simplicity.

--Matthew Pook

Shadows and Fogg, Part the Third

"Nine days after leaving Yokohama, Phileas Fogg had gone round exactly half the terrestrial globe."
-- Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days,* Chapter XXIV

Here we are on the third stretch of our voyage around *Around the World in Eighty Days,* and by now, we're far enough around the world that we can start seeing where we've been. Verne's novel reflects (or records, or disinforms) a geomantic Working (or meteor-hunting mission, or both) performed in 1872 (or 1858, the date given in Verne's unpublished first draft) by an agent (or agents) of one (or more) transdimensional conspiracies first interleaved in our 200th Transmission way back when. The novel's 37 chapters mark off the 36 decans (the first and last, of course, take place in the same scene -- it's a circle), the twelve legs of Fogg's journey (by his own count) mark off the twelve signs of the zodiac. Verne also divides the journey into eight ports of call (in Chapter III), which match the eight-fold turnings of the wheel of the year.

For example, per the novel Fogg crosses the 180th meridian in the middle of the Pacific on the cusp date of November 23, 1872. This takes place in Chapter XXIV, the 24th decan around from Naôth in our chapter-map, which is to say Ouare, the third decan of Taurus and governor of technology. Technology does indeed underpin the book, does indeed mirror Naôth, communication, as one of Verne's themes. (The actual decan of November 23 is Anatreth, the decan of movement, yet another theme of the novel. Interesting coincidence, that.) The voyage across the Pacific (Yokohama to San Francisco) is the ninth leg by Fogg's count, and the ninth house around from Libra (when we set out from Fogg's balanced life) is Gemini. By Verne's count, it is the voyage from Imbolc to Ostara, from first fire to full spring, eminently suitable for Fogg's journey to the New World and the young republic of America.

"It now seemed certain that Fogg wouldn't stop at Yokohama, that he would immediately catch the steamship for San Francisco, since America's vast spaces would guarantee him sanctuary and impunity. Phileas Fogg's plan struck him as perfectly simple."
-- Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days,* Chapter XXI

As he has throughout, it is Passepartout who takes the mystical heat for Fogg. He is the first to set foot on America, in classical Fool style by attempting to execute "a perfect somersault." (A tiny circle, an epicycle if you will, of the larger Working?) But he winds up falling through the wood of the dock, wrong-footing himself, and symbolically absorbing the magical blowback from Fogg's extension of the Working circuit to a new node.

To Verne, America was a powerful symbol of inexhaustible natural resources, a kind of a capacitor for vast potential power. In *Around the World in Eighty Days,* as well as in other novels such as *The Begum's Fortune, From the Earth to the Moon, North against South,* and *The Master of the World,* Verne points up this notion of a vast America as Arcadian source of almost cosmic energy. As America's genius locus, Abraham Lincoln appears in both *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (in a portrait on board the *Nautilus*) and *Around the World in Eighty Days* (in a flashback describing the building of the transcontinental railway -- a Working in its own right, perhaps) despite being dead by the time either novel takes place. Despite being dead, Abraham Lincoln also appeared in the America of 1872 -- his ghost manifested itself to Mrs. Lincoln on February 4.

"The weather was cold, and the sky grey, but the snow was no longer falling. The disc of the sun, enlarged by the mist, seemed like an enormous gold coin. Passepartout was in the middle of calculating its value in pounds sterling, when he was distracted from this useful occupation by the appearance of rather a strange personage."
-- Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days,* Chapter XXVII

And America, and San Francisco in particular, are also seen (by Passepartout, and by Verne) as lands of gold. Verne's attitude toward gold appears dismissive -- in *Five Weeks in a Balloon,* Dr. Fergusson uses it as ballast, and the *Volcano of Gold* in the end erupts its molten wealth uselessly into the ocean. Likewise, the meteor of pure gold in Verne's intriguingly named *Hunt for the Meteor* explodes and drizzles into the sea, and in *Hector Servadac,* a mighty comet of golden telluride carries a few men into outer space rather than enriching them. But this is the kind of metaphor, we're told, that alchemists engage in. Gold is only a symbol -- of its use, or of the heart's desire. The true gold -- in Verne's

world as well as that of the alchemists and magi -- is knowledge.

"The inauguration of the great railway was thus celebrated, and an instrument of progress and civilization thrown across the desert, designed to link towns and cities that had not yet come into existence. The whistle of the locomotive, more powerful than Amphion's Lyre, would soon make them sprout from the American soil."
-- Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days,* Chapter XXVII

And thus Fogg plunges into the American Arcadia, seeking the "gold" of the Philosopher's Stone, the True Knowledge. All America is one leg of twelve, one house of heaven. By our strict count, it should be oceanic Cancer, but golden Leo seems more appropriate. (Perhaps the "wide gap of time" in mid-Pacific advances us by one house, or is America in truth both silver Moon of Cancer and golden Sun of Leo?) Either way, Fogg once more plays whist all the way across the continent by train, continuously mapping his journey in the flow of chance, or determining his fate by means of his pasteboard operating system. Is he searching for something, perhaps? Intriguingly, the plot of the Verne novel *An Eccentric's Will* concerns a great fortune which can be won only by traveling across the American landscape in certain paths and patterns determined by the throw of dice.

Here, guided by the fall of cards as in his whist-powered passage into India, Fogg enters a magical no-place, the America Ultraterrestria perhaps sought and circled by [Lewis and Clark] on their own Working 67 years before. Verne describes the "fields and watercourses" of America as disappearing "under a uniform whiteness." (This is also approximately where the first draft manuscript of Verne's novel ends, with Fogg vanishing into "America's vast spaces.") In the final version of the novel, Verne clearly parallels America and India. Both have religiously inspired marriage customs that Fogg's party reject -- suttee in Bundelkhand, polygamy in Utah; both have "Indian troubles" with the railroad and indeed are attacked with arrows; both feature interrupted rail journeys; both feature a rescue. Both have Golcondas in them (the one in Nevada is on the rail line, though not mentioned in the novel), and phantom places in both are noted in Verne's manuscript. Just like the elusive stations of Rothal and Kandallah in India, Fogg travels through the nonexistent Plum Creek, Junction Station, and Camp Walbah in America.

"Two hours were enough to visit this thoroughly American town, built on the pattern of every city in the Union: huge chessboards with long cold lines, infused with 'the lugubrious sadness of the right angle', as Victor Hugo says."
-- Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days,* Chapter XXVII

Only the line of the railroad stretches across this vastness, from the nonexistent stations of the West to the "towns with ancient names, some with streets and trams but no houses built in them as yet" in the East. All America is empty, waiting for the "fiat urbis" of the train whistle. Or is the train whistle resonating with some hidden frequency, established along the "huge chessboards" of the American towns? Likewise, the ice-sledge crossing the "deserted" Nebraska plains summons up the station as the wind in the rigging makes "the [fifth] and the octave," an invocation perhaps of Hermes lord of the crossroads -- the "X" that marks the spot for the True City of Cibola.

Verne places Utopian cities -- Saint-Simonian "cities of good will" -- in deserts and trackless spots in his books, such as Antekirtta in the Sahara in *Mathias Sandorf,* and Coal City in the depths of a subterranean mine in *The Black Indies.* And Franceville, in *The Begum's Fortune* -- which Verne locates in Oregon, of all places. Is there here a glint of [Mount Shasta], perhaps an MI-8 stake laid down for the Lemurians in their war against Argus for the American West? Why does Fogg -- the time-obsessed un-tourist -- go two hours out of his way to visit Salt Lake City? Is he examining the "huge chessboard" at the heart of the Land Promised to the (Latter-Day) Saints? Can he see [Brendan's Isle], the [Grail Land], down its "long cold lines"? Fogg enters the empty quarter, and again Passepartout, not Fogg, undergoes the initiatory captivity and ceremonial death -- his third after India and Hong Kong. Once more, we note the time-twisting nature of such things; in the novel, Fogg and party (including the restored Passepartout) visit Fort Kearney in 1872, whereas in reality Fort Kearney was abandoned in 1871. Is this "ghost fort" a guard post on the way into America Ultraterrestria, a "railroad bull" watching the approaches to the [Big Rock Candy Mountain]? And if so, what did Passepartout bring back from that undiscovered country?

"Never was a duel easier to arrange. Mr Fogg and Colonel Proctor, each equipped with two six-shooters, entered the carriage. Their seconds, remaining outside, shut them in. On the first whistle blast from the locomotive, they were to open fire. . . . Then, after exactly two minutes, what remained of the gentlemen would be removed from the carriage."

-- Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days,* Chapter XXIX

But in order to leave the sacred space, the American Arcadia, with the Grail of golden knowledge, Fogg would have to fight its champion, perhaps its king. He meets "Colonel Stamp Proctor" in San Francisco, "a great strapping man with broad shoulders, a red goatee, and a ruddy complexion." Could this Yankee be an avatar of Uncle Sam? A genius locus of Utah, where "Proctor" is a stop on the Pacific Line? Is he a mere watchman (a "proctor") guarding the approaches? Or is he something more?

He reappears at the suggestively named Green River Station. When he challenges Fogg to a duel, Fogg attempts to suggest a date six months in advance, recalling, perhaps, the Green Knight's challenge. Proctor provokes the duel by criticizing Fogg's whist playing, suggesting a diamond instead of Fogg's ten of spades (a pentacle instead of the sword). Is Proctor suggesting a magical duel? It seems neither, for all their bluster, really want to test the waters. But Fogg plays the ten of spades -- the Ten of Swords -- the "stab in the back," the card of desolation, of ruin. (Per Crowley, the card of "soulless mechanism." Interesting that Fogg would play that.) And so the two prepare to duel, in the sealed train carriage fifty feet long, recapitulating the dimensions of the burial chamber in the Red Pyramid of Dashur. And at the end, it is Stamp Proctor who receives the Dolorous Blow -- "a bullet in the groin." Verne blames the Sioux, not Fogg -- but then Fogg somehow leaves Passepartout to the Sioux for the third ritual death.

And 14 years later, Verne may have suffered his own backlash from the contest. On March 9, 1886, Verne's nephew Gaston -- "with whom he had maintained the most affectionate relations" -- shot the novelist in his left leg during an apparent assassination attempt. Eight days later, his publisher Pierre Hetzel died. Desolation. Ruin. The Dolorous Blow. Verne sold his beloved yacht, and the Extraordinary Voyager never again left France.

Next: Shadows and Fogg, Part the Fourth: In Which We Measure A Circle Ending Anywhere

Magical Telegraphy

for the *d20 System*

by Michael Tresca

Telegraphy (from the Greek words *tele* = far and *graphein* = write) literally means the transmission of written messages across distance without physical transport. The advent of the telegraph revolutionized America. What took months to deliver by horse could be transported almost instantly to the adjacent town. The implications for this new form of communication were staggering, changing everything from cultural exchanges across borders to long-distance love affairs to a new crime-stopping tool.

Spells like *message, whispering wind,* and *sending* are a unique form telegraphy; only they're even more powerful than the telegraph. With *sending,* spell casters can exchange up to 25 words with someone they know, so long as they're on the same plane of existence. Even then, there is only a 5% chance that the message doesn't get through.

Magical telegraphy can mobilize communities in a way no lord possibly could. When criminals (or adventurers) commit a crime, the next town over will know about it before the criminal even arrives. Any major event can be instantly communicated across villages, kingdoms, continents, and even worlds. Two adventurers with a chance meeting on another plane of existence could keep in constant contact on their respective worlds thanks to sending, or at least through wizards casting the spell on their behalf.

Familiarity

But what qualifies as "someone you know"? Consider these quantifiers.

Familiarity	Sending Failure
Very Familiar	0%
Somewhat Familiar	6%
Know Casually	12%
Met Once	23%

"Very familiar" is a person have been around very often; a friend or family member. "Somewhat familiar" is a person you know well, either because you can currently see them, you've visited them recently, or you have used other means (such as scrying) to study them for at least one hour. "Know casually" is a person that you have met more than once but with whom you are not very familiar. "Met once" is a person that you have met once, possibly using magic.

These rules ensure that sending isn't a perfect process. It's in the best interest of two casters to be very familiar with each other before casting the spell. It also means that sending is not a guaranteed means of communication. Still, even if the spell fails, the caster can always try again.

Counter Tactics

Crime thrives in areas where communication is poor. Towns that cannot accurately report suspicious activity or even a murder cannot organize to defend against a threat. A dragon's rampage is a surprise to an isolated medieval village, but not a wizard's keep thanks to sending. A group of murdering bandits can be tracked from place to place with the sending spell, ensuring that hundreds of eyewitnesses can help the law track the bad guys down. And adventurers who cross the wrong people may find that a cult knows their every move…all because of sending.

With the advent of magical telegraphy, it's only natural that someone would invent a means to halt the spell's progress.

There are of course the obvious methods, using intimidation, bribery, or murder to stop a spell caster from passing on the message. On the other hand, sometimes a magical communication requires a magical response.

Message Lock

Abjuration

Level:	Sor/Wiz 4
Components:	V, S
Casting Time:	1 standard action
Range:	Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)
Area:	1 mile/level radius spread
Duration:	1 hour/level (D)
Saving Throw:	None
Spell Resistance:	No

Often cast by criminals who need time to escape, this spell causes all forms of magical telegraphy to cease within its boundaries. Forms of communication barred by a *message lock* include *message, whispering wind, sending,* and similar spell-like or psionic abilities. A *message lock* does not interfere with telepathy, spoken, or written communication when the spell is cast.

Intercept Message

Illusion (Glamer)

Level:	Brd 5, Sor/Wiz 5
Components:	V, S
Casting Time:	1 standard action
Range:	Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)
Area:	1 mile/level radius spread
Duration:	1 hour/level (D)
Saving Throw:	None
Spell Resistance:	No

Any magical telegraphy used (e.g., message, whispering wind, sending) to contact any being within the area of this spell instead receives a false message of 25 words or less, as defined by you at the time of casting. The message still appears to come from the original caster. As long as the duration lasts, you can concentrate to change the message as desired. While you aren't concentrating, the message remains static.

Trace Message

Divination

Level:	Sor/Wiz 5
Components:	Visual
Casting Time:	1 standard action
Range:	Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)
Area:	Spread with a radius of 25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels, centered on you
Duration:	Instantaneous
Saving Throw:	None
Spell Resistance:	No

You sense the use of any magical telegraphy (e.g., message, whispering wind, sending) within the area. You sense the use of these spells whether or not you have line of sight or line of effect (although a force effect prevents this detection). When you sense the use of an appropriate spell, you know the direction in which the spell was used, and you can trace the target of any magical message made by others within this spell's area within the last minute.

You know the direction and distance the message traveled and can magically communicate with the target if you so desired (and if you have the magical means), as if you "know casually" the target. This spell does not grant you any information about the target of the message at the other end of the trace beyond the message itself.

Other Applications

The advent of magical telegraphy means never being completely out of touch with the rest of the world. Ships can travel further and faster without fear of becoming lost. In times of poor weather, navigation is easier, possibly relayed by someone with better senses to navigate the storm or even simply above the storm altogether (e.g., a mountain at a higher altitude).

Magical telegraphy revolutionizes warfare. All it takes is one scout to relay a message back to an opposing army with critical information about troop type, number, and speed. News is not only timely, it's expected; wandering reporters can provide daily updates on the latest happenings around the globe. Spy networks become nearly unstoppable, and the flow of secrets journeys from King's vault to Queen's ears in the blink of an eye.

Service	Cost	Range	Minimum Caster Level
Message	5 gp	110 feet	1st-level wizard
Whispering Wind	60 gp	3 miles	3rd-level wizard
Sending	450 gp	Unlimited	9th-level wizard

With all this power, messenger services go out of business. There's no need to send a message on horseback when you can pay a wizard to cast *whispering wind* at the next town over . . .

Sir Boris Boar-Spear (Ms.), and Retinue

for *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*

by Jody Macgregor

Bretonnia is a very different nation to its neighbor, the Empire. The Imperials' close relationship with the Dwarfs has given them access to black-powder weapons and other technology, their alliance with Teclis and the High Elves led to the enlightened founding of the Imperial Colleges of Magic, and all on their own they're struggling out of the feudal system and toward something brighter with their emergent middle class of city-folk and electoral system. Admittedly, only 12 people in the entire country get to vote, most of the populace can't read, and corruption is everywhere you turn, but the Empire is clearly slouching toward better things -- lying in the gutter, but looking at the stars.

In Bretonnia things are different. The gap between the nobility and the peasantry is wide, with only a few members of something resembling a merchant class in the middle. Guilds are illegal, monarchy reigns, sumptuary laws strictly regulate what peasants can wear, and women are not allowed to wield arms, stray from socially accepted roles, or even uncover their hair. This can be quite a culture shock for Imperials, who find talking to Bretonnians akin to stepping backward in time. This makes traveling Bretonnians excellent foils for Imperial Player Characters; they cast the differences in a stronger light and help give PCs a sense of their own cultural identity. They also make excellent PCs themselves, especially for those used to more traditional fantasy settings, who will find it easy to play fish out of water in the gritty Renaissance-like Empire.

Sir Boris Boar-Spear and her retinue of companions are just such a group of Bretonnians for use as foils or as PCs -- yes, "her." They can be encountered in bar rooms, where their foreign attitudes and general strangeness may cause friction with the locals, or on the road in search of adventure, where they will make fine traveling companions for our heroes to measure themselves against.

Only Sir Boris speaks fluent Reikspiel, which can be the cause of much trouble and comical misunderstandings, but you may allow other Characters to make Speak Language Tests with their native tongue to make themselves understood. Breton and Reikspiel share many words and may have evolved from a common root language, after all.

Background

In the village of Joffre, deep in the dark Forest of Arden in the divided duchy of Artois, a girl with the unfortunate name of Vermengard was born. Vermengard was from a peasant family, and would have probably spent her entire life farming potatoes and turnips if a band of traveling players hadn't braved the forest and performed in the village when she was a child. Vermengard was bewitched by the tales of heroism and chivalry they spun. Afterwards, she bossily rounded up several of the village children and re-enacted the stories with herself in the lead role.

Twenty years have passed, and little has change. Vermengard is still that same bossy girl with a thirst for adventure, no matter how she dresses or who she pretends to be. She has amassed a small retinue of companions, none of whom suspect her secret and all of whom have good reason to leave home and follow her on her "errantry tour." When they travel Vermengard rides at the front on her horse, Genevieve, followed by Pascal driving his cart with Algernon in the back among their merchandise, usually asleep. Behind them comes Louis le Spider, seeming perfectly happy to haul his cart of junk by himself as he shuffles along wearing a demented grin.

Sir Boris Boar-Spear, a.k.a. Vermengard

Race: Human
Career: Knight Errant

"For the King and the Lady, follow me! Follow me!"

Vermengard grew up independent and strong-willed, and when her parents offered her to a prestigious local pig farmer in an arranged marriage, she refused and ran away. In Joffre, when someone leaves the village they are assumed to be dead and a full funeral is performed, so when Vermengard left to find a more interesting life involving less pigs and potatoes and rather more adventure, she knew she could never return. At least not without her family being convinced she was a Ghost or a Vampire or some other revenant who should be dealt with by stuffing garlic in her mouth and crow's feet in her ears and returning her to the grave.

Knowing that a lone woman would arouse suspicion, she began dressing as a man as she traveled. The ruse worked perfectly. No woman would dare break the law by wearing a man's clothes, so everyone she met assumed Vermengard was merely a young man with a high voice. Vermengard realized that if a woman could so easily be disguised as a man, a peasant could easily be disguised as a knight. She worked as a stable boy in the town of Larret until a wealthy knight visited. Then, she "borrowed" his horse and gear, which almost fits her, renamed herself Boris, and fulfilled her childish dream of becoming a knight. Her ruse was aided by the fact that Bretonnians have no system of squiring like the Empire does, and people are accustomed to seeing a young knight fall off his horse a few times while learning the ropes. It is considered highly impolite to laugh, especially since a knight may wish to test the sharpness of his blade on a giggling peasant.

Bretonnian Characters are completely unable to see through her disguise, even though it consists of a short haircut, a suit of armor, and the occasional burp. Other Characters may take a Perception Test to realize that he is a she, but they will be unable to convince Bretonnians of the fact, who will explain away almost any evidence, no matter how fanciful their explanations become. The very idea of a woman pretending to be a man is simply beyond most's ability to conceive.

The crest of Sir Boris is quartered, black and white, and depicts the head of a ferocious Artois boar and a lance on the white quarters.

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
28%	36%	32%	32%	29%	30%	30%	31%
+15```	--	+5%`	+5%	+5%`	--	+5%`	+5%`
43%	36%	37%	32%	34%	30%	35%	36%

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
1	12	3	3	4	0	0	3
+1`	+2``	--	--	--	--	--	--
2	14	3	3	4	0	0	0

Skills: Academic Knowledge (Genealogy/Heraldry), Animal Care, Animal Training, Common Knowledge (Bretonnia +10%), Dodge Blow, Gossip, Outdoor Survival, Ride, Speak Language (Breton, Reikspiel)

Talents: Ambidextrous, Etiquette, Excellent Vision, Seasoned Traveler, Specialist Weapon Group (Cavalry), Strike Mighty Blow, Virtue of Chivalry **Special Rules:** Sir Boris gets a +10% bonus on all Common Knowledge Tests that deal with her home dukedom of Artois.

Armor: Medium Armor (Mail Shirt, Mail Coif, Leather Jack, Helmet)
Armor Points: Head 4, Arms 1, Body 3, Legs 0

Weapons: Dagger, Hand Weapon (sword), Lance, Shield

Trappings: Sling Bag, Blanket, Wooden Tankard, Wooden Cutlery Set, Light Warhorse Named Genevieve with Saddle and Harness, 7 gold ecu, 4 silver denier, 2 pence

Genevieve

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
30%	0%	40%	40%	30%	10%	10%	0%

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
1	14	4	4	8	0	0	0

Skills: Perception +10%, Swim

Talents: Acute Hearing, Keen Senses, Natural Weapons, Strike Mighty Blow

Louis le Spider

Race: Human
Career: Bone Picker

"I was just looking at it and it went off! I didn't mean to scare anyone."

Louis, or "Spider" as he is known for his wasted, stick-like limbs and strange, scurrying gait, was born in the cursed duchy of Mousillon. Deformities like his are tragically common in that land, and Spider lived in a shanty town made up of freaks like himself in the heart of a swamp. Spider was a loner who scraped an unhappy living together by dredging junk from the swamp-water, which he sold in Mousillon City, and it was while checking his nets that he found Sir Boris, injured after an encounter with the less friendly inhabitants of the swamp. Spider took the knight in and helped her recover, though his neighbors disliked the idea of allowing an outsider into their community. Eventually they formed a mob to burn Sir Boris, and she and Spider were forced to flee the swamp.

Spider has never traveled outside the duchy in his life, and he views every new sight with wonder. He's never had much in the way of friends either, so the time he spends with the knight's retinue is the best of his life. He has a tendency to wander around with an idiotic grin on his face, gawping like a tourist and fiddling with unfamiliar objects, which can lead to trouble. More than once he's wandered off to have a closer look at something interesting only to cause problems for his friends.

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
37%	31%	25%	30%	35%	23%	32%	29%
+5%`	--	+5%`	+10%``	+5%`	--	+5%`	+5%`
42%	31%	30%	40%	40%	23%	42%*	34%

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
1	12	2	3	4	0	0	3
--	+2``	--	--	--	--	--	--

| 1 | 15* | 3 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 0 |

Skills: Animal Care, Common Knowledge (Bretonnia +10%), Drive, Evaluate, Gossip +10%, Haggle, Perception, Resistance to Disease, Search, Speak Language (Breton)

Talents: Coolheaded*, Hardy*, Strong-minded, Warrior Born*

Special Rules: Louis le Spider gets a +10% bonus on all Common Knowledge Tests that deal with his home dukedom of Mousillon.

Armor: None
Armor Points: Head 0, Arms 0, Body 0, Legs 0

Weapons: Dagger, Hand Weapon (bone club) **Trappings:** Sling Bag, Blanket, Wooden Tankard, Wooden Cutlery Set, Cart, 3 Sacks of Useless Junk, 3 silver denier, 2 pence

Pascal

Race: Human **Career:** Smuggler

"Just because it's illegal doesn't mean it's wrong, you know."

Pascal thinks of himself as a basically honest man forced into dishonest ways to make a living, although he secretly enjoys the covert activities he engages in. The taxation system of Bretonnia is designed for peasants who don't take their goods further than the nearest town, and a trader with an eye for good deals over long distances like Pascal would be impoverished if he paid the required one turnip out of every three in each fief his goods passed through. Smuggling is the only viable option, although Pascal had never smuggled people -- or a horse -- before Sir Boris and Spider asked for his help in leaving Mousillon with haste. Pascal was eager to leave himself, as he and his associate, Algernon, had run up some debts during their visit and the collectors were about to catch up.

Pascal has continued to travel with Sir Boris because it makes for an excellent cover. He's eager to see foreign lands, especially lands where a canny businessman like himself can make a quick buck without being ripped-off by the toffs. Although he won't admit it to himself, there's another reason he's joined Sir Boris's retinue. He's found himself deeply attracted to the knight, which is disturbing for someone like Pascal, who's always thought himself a lady's man.

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
39%	32%	36%	27%	32%	31%	36%	31%
+5`	+5`	--	--	+10``	+10``	--	+10``
44%	37%	36%	27%	42%	41%	36%	41%

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
1	11	3	2	4	0	0	3
--	+2``	--	--	--	--	--	--
1	13	3	2	4	0	0	0

Skills: Common Knowledge (Bretonnia), Drive, Gossip, Haggle, Perception, Row, Search, Secret Language (Thieves' Tongue), Secret Signs (Thief), Silent Move, Speak Language (Breton), Swim

Talents: Acute Hearing, Resistance to Disease, Streetwise

Special Rules: Pascal gets a +10% bonus on all Common Knowledge Tests that deal with his home dukedom of L'Anguille.

Armor: Light Armor (Leather Jack)
Armor Points: Head 0, Arms 1, Body 1, Legs 0

Weapons: Dagger, Hand Weapon (sword)

Trappings: Sling Bag, Blanket, Wooden Tankard, Wooden Cutlery Set, Draft Horse and Cart, 2 Torches, Healing Draught, 8 gold ecu, 10 silver denier

Draft Horse

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
25%	0%	35%	35%	35%	10%	10%	0%

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
0	12	3	3	6	0	0	0

Talents: Acute Hearing, Keen Senses

Algernon

Race: Human
Career: Pit Fighter

"You want me to tell you the odds of my fist breaking your jaw?"

Algernon was an orphan living on the streets of L'Anguille when a dockside gang took him in. He grew up a petty thug and bare-knuckle brawler who found a little infamy in Bretonnia's fighting pits. It wasn't until he corrected a bookie laying odds on one of his fights that Algernon's other gift came to light; he may be illiterate, but he never gets the numbers wrong. There are plenty of opportunities for a numbers man in the criminal world, and Algernon found himself performing the calculations for Pascal's many scams, as well as providing occasional muscle. These scams were never as profitable as they could be, and the money never lasted long.

The hero game is very high-risk, but Algernon thinks it will be worth it in the long run. He's finding that he enjoys spending a little time on the less dubious side of the law, and he's become fast friends with Louis (Algernon is the only one who doesn't call him Spider), who shares his, shall we say, intellectual simplicity as well as his zeal for life, seeing new things, and meeting new people -- even though he often ends up hitting those people rather a lot.

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
31%	32%	36%	36%	29%	23%	31%	28%
+15%```	--	--	+10``	+10`	--	+10%``	--
46%	32%	41%*	46%	34%	23%	41%	28%

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
1	10	4	3	4	0	0	3
--	+2``	--	--	--	--	--	--
1	12	4	4	4	0	0	0

Skills: Common Knowledge (Bretonnia), Dodge Blow, Gossip, Intimidate, Speak Language (Breton)

Talents: Disarm, Strike to Injure, Specialist Weapon Group (Flail, Parrying, Two-handed), Strike Mighty Blow, Strong-minded, Super Numerate, Very Strong*

Special Rules: Algernon gets a +10% bonus on all Common Knowledge Tests that deal with his home dukedom of L'Anguille.

Armor: Medium Armor (Mail Shirt and Leather Jack)
Armor Points: Head 0, Arms 1, Body 3, Legs 0

Weapons: Great Weapon (two-handed axe), Hand Weapon (axe), Knuckle-duster, Shield

Trappings: Sling Bag, Blanket, Wooden Tankard, Wooden Cutlery Set, 4 gold ecu

See Also

- Sir Boris and her retinue were created using ***Knights of the Grail: A Guide to Bretonnia,*** which is an invaluable source of information on that dangerous land. Each of them has been given 10 advances, although their starting profiles and Fate Points are shown if you wish to reset them back to brand-new Characters.
- The adventure ***Barony of the Damned,*** set in cursed Mousillon, may also be of use for those who would like to explore the land of Bretonnia further.
- Terry Pratchett's *Monstrous Regiment,* in which a girl disguises herself as a boy to join the army in search of her brother, may be helpful. Like all of the Discworld stories it resemble *Warhammer* at its most gloriously silly.
- The *Blackadder II* episode "Bells" tells the story of Lord Blackadder's confused love for his manservant, who is secretly a girl. *Blackadder II* makes excellent source material for ***Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay.*** (The same plot was recycled in *Blackadder Goes to War,* although with a twist.)
- Shakespeare's plays are full of women dressing as men. Of particular relevance are *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* and *As You Like It,* in which Rosalind disguises herself as a page and flees to the Forest of Arden.
- Luc Besson's film *The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc* is a good source for all things faux-France like Bretonnia, and by an amazing coincidence continues the theme of women who dress like men.

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Review

Top Dogs

Published by [Playroom Entertainment](#)

Designed by Maureen Hiron

Art by Randy Martinez

Boxed set with 115 full-color cards and instruction booklet (in English, Spanish, & French); $12

Huskies, as it turns out, are among the most willful of canine companions. You have to keep on top of them, or they'll try to establish dominance in your household . . . just ask Cuba Gooding, Jr.* But they are an invaluable part of any successful sled team, so make judicious use of them as you compete in *Top Dogs* from Playroom Entertainment.

The object of the game is to score the most points by the end of two full hands.

Each player takes a Musher Card showing his racer -- which one doesn't matter, they're simply a fun way to identify who's who. Of course, the same can be said of the car in *Monopoly,* so there very well may be arguments here about who gets to play the yeti or the polar bear. All players have an identical hand of 20 cards showing the dogs they have to choose from for each race.

The Trophy Deck consists of 10 Trophy Cards, each representing one of the races you'll run (or the Iditarod in general, depending on which back story you like the most). The decks are shuffled, the top Trophy Card is flipped over, and everyone draws the first seven cards from their deck. Different kinds of dogs are worth different numbers, so the lowly Chihuahua is only printed with a two while the Huskies, very much in their element, are worth a full six. Each race requires you to play three dogs to create your team.

Like numbers are multiplied by one other, while unlike numbers are added. For example, a team of Poodles, with a printed value of three, would be worth 27 points in a race ($3 \times 3 \times 3 = 27$). If you couldn't field a full rein of Poodles and threw in a German Shepherd (valued at five), you would multiply the two Poodles and add the Shepherd ($3 \times 3 + 5 = 14$). Everyone compares their total, and the highest score wins the race and takes the cup. If two or more racers tie for the top spot, however, they're so busy maneuvering against each other on the path that they allow the next-highest number to slip by to victory. Committing your best hand on the big-value cups may not be the savviest strategy in the long run.

You have to discard an extra card after each race, so you can't always build the perfect hand by holding back all the right cards, either. When you get to the bottom of your deck (and yes, the last hand will be whatever you can cobble together from your last four really lousy cards), you shuffle it all together again and vie for the next five Trophies. The cups are valued from seven to 16, though it's not a linear progression; the values are doubled in some places (two sevens, two nines . . .). Whoever has the highest total from all their Trophy Cards wins.

Visually, the game is easily a winner. The cute illustrations are wonderful, using big, bold strokes and color that contrasts sharply with the wintry backgrounds. The component quality is equally commendable -- good, tough cards ready for wear and tear even by the most eager youngsters at the table. While the distinct texture of the cards doesn't prevent smooth shuffling, there's still the danger of starting a small fire, kind of like wearing a pair of corduroy pants.

The races are an excellent way to introduce your younger gamers to math, though the adults can find enough challenge

in the rules to keep them entertained in spite of the age difference. It's odd that a game that touts the numbers side of things also tells you not to worry about the math (they provide the cube root of numbers two through six for you), but barring one of those "perfect three" hands, you can still sneak the little ones a bit of number-crunching and they're none the wiser. Adults don't need to play with kids to find the game engaging, but while the box says it seats three to five players, it's better at the upper limit. Otherwise, you're not trying to outthink enough opponents.

The mechanics may not be terribly original, but they are ideal for a game from a company that manages to stick all that lousy book learnin' into their products. ***Top Dogs*** keeps play moving, and while it won't form the bulk of the evening's entertainment, it's a gentle way to dip one's toes in the water, and could be good connective tissue between other, bigger games throughout the night.

*Not included.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Executive Decision: A White-Knuckle Game Of Real-Time Political Crisis

Written by Greg Stolze with D. Vincent Baker, Dennis Detwiller, Ron Edwards, Daniel Solis, & Chad Underkoffler

Layout by Daniel Solis

310kb Zipped File containing one 309kb & one 222kb PDF documents; $1,000

The first thing you may well have noticed about this game is the price.

It really did cost a $1,000.

Fortunately you can now get it for free. Go to the publisher's website and download it now, but do something else while you are there. Make a donation. For *Executive Decision: A White-Knuckle Game Of Real-Time Political Crisis* is part of a number of roleplaying projects created and sold to raise money for the Hurricane Katrina Relief efforts. Yet where others have used the more traditional method of donating an amount based on the number of books sold, *Executive Decision* employs the "Ransom Method."

Particular to the use of the PDF format, under the Ransom Method, an author announces that he has a game or book ready to release, but will only do so once a certain amount of money has been donated. In this case, $1,000 -- all going to the American Red Cross. Elsewhere Dennis Detwiller is using the same method to fund the release of a series of scenarios for *Delta Green,* the highly regarded modern conspiracy setting for *Call of Cthulhu.*

As the title suggests, *Executive Decision* is actually pertinent to the disaster it is intended to raise money for, because as politicized as Hurricane Katrina and its effects have become, this game deals with the subject of politics, and then at the highest of levels. Where most recent political games concentrated on getting elected to the position of President of the United States of America, *Executive Decision* is solely about the decisions made while holding that office.

The set-up is simple. One player takes the role of President (preferably whomever bought the game), while the others take those of members of his cabinet: the Secretaries of Defense, Commerce, Agriculture, the Interior, Labor, State, the Treasury, plus his Vice President, Attorney General, and Chief of Staff. Over the course of a crisis -- the President announces the details of which as they occur -- the members of the cabinet debate the situation at hand and give advice to the President. Their input influences the decisions he must make at each stage of the crisis. Of course the President is under no obligation to do so, but whatever he does decide will in some way support one or more agendas of his cabinet.

It is only these agendas that define each role; the Secretary of Defense is Pro-Military of course, the Secretary of Commerce pursues Economic Development, the Vice President seeks greater Tax Revenue, while the Chief of Staff is concerned with Voter Satisfaction. Only the Secretary of Agriculture comes without a defined agenda. In addition a player can choose as many as three extra agendas, which can be revealed before the game starts or kept secret throughout. A player cannot acquire or change an agenda during the game.

Game play is simple, requiring no other components than pens, paper, and a mirror. The latter is necessary because parts of each scenario are printed in reverse so that only the President can read them using the mirror. Alternatively, he can just use it to make sure he looks good on camera. At the beginning of a scenario or crisis, the President announces the situation and asks for advice and thoughts. Members of his Cabinet are expected to argue, debate, and harangue each other, and the President is expected to encourage this, literally playing Devil's Advocate as well as the role of the

referee.

After roughly 20 minutes have passed (or the players have exhausted the debate), the President receives developments on the situation (revealed by use of the mirror) and after informing the Cabinet, the debate continues. This occurs usually two or three more times over the course of a crisis, until about an hour or so has passed. At this time each member of the Cabinet asserts his position and advises the President, who then takes his "executive decision."

Depending upon this decision, a player receives or loses points for the agendas that he favors. If the outcome for an agenda is up, he gains a point, if an agenda is down, he loses a point. At the end of the game and crisis, the Cabinet member with the most points is the winner.

In effect *Executive Decision* is a LARP, not dissimilar to a Murder Mystery Party game, but one that can be played while seated as if the players were in the Cabinet Room or Oval Office. Three to six players are suggested, but there is no reason stopping 11 participating, with 10 as members of the Cabinet, and the 11th as the President. Players can choose to dress up for the part or not, nothing more than suits being required; while your venue for the game can dressed up as is your wont, although where you get the Philippine busboy to serve the coffee is your own affair. The only real skill required by the participants is an ability to present an argument, hopefully one that is persuasive.

The simply presented PDF comes in two versions, one complete at 15-pages long that includes the game's rules and the five crises presented in mirror format. The other is four pages shorter and gives the scenarios in an un-mirrored format. The five scenarios -- written by some of the industry's leading lights -- take in turn crisis that involve domestic and foreign politics, and naturally are all very American. This isn't a criticism, but it means that the players need to have an awareness of American politics and government. Which of course, can be acquired through a little research or watching *The West Wing.* And while the game is about politics, it is non-political; it does not push an agenda of its own or hove to any particular party line, though doubtless participants will bring that to this game's table. The five scenarios can also serve as models for further crises, the details of which are up to the President's imagination and a little research, whether from the news, history, or Tom Clancy novels.

Having played in similar scenarios before, such experiences have tended towards the consensual, the results towards the compromise. Not so *Executive Decision,* which is intentionally adversarial from the outset. It is this that is likely to push the scenarios beyond the hour's length given for each and hopefully provide a good natured and hopefully politically enlightening evening's worth of entertainment.

The West Wing RPG this is not -- it involves less walking -- but *Executive Decision* is a roleplaying game that, like the Murder Mystery Party format, should appeal beyond confines of the hobby. It is aided in this in its simple rules and quick set-up time; the length of preparation required being no more than 10 minutes. To what degree the game simulates the events and processes of making an executive decision is another matter, but it certainly simulates it as we would imagine it to be. Plus it is probably the closest that any of us will come to giving advice to the President of the United States of America.

That *Executive Decision: A White-Knuckle Game Of Real-Time Political Crisis* is free and available speaks of the generosity of both the contributors who created the five crises, and those that contributed to its ransom. It would be trite to say that the best things in life are free, but even though this game is effectively both, there is no reason not to make a small donation.

--Matthew Pook

Unlimited Adventures In Limited Resources

As I begin to type this column, I have about 15 hours before I need to head out the door to catch a plane. While millions of my fellow gamers are traveling during this week *into* Indianapolis for the eleven-jillionth annual GenCon extravaganza, I'll be spending my first GenCon weekend in Indy flying *out* of the city for the World Yo-Yo Contest, an event I've helped run for seven years now, despite not being able to throw a yo-yo consistently without konking myself in the head.

Where was I? Let's see . . . head injury, fleeing Indianapolis, promise of an uncomfortable flight, ah . . . here we are! Fifteen hours. Right.

Anyway, in that time, I need to finish *Pyramid* (including writing my column), find some books in the Closet of Doom that I haven't seen long before we moved, go to the library lest bespectacled Indy librarians release a white weather balloon to retrieve me, pack, and make sure about a jillion other things are done.

In 14.75 hours.

Now, many games are built around limited resources in a thousand different ways. Spell points, skill points, gold pieces, willpower, and so on. However, limited resources can also be a wonderful hook to build an adventure on. Unfortunately, they're often not considered very often in many games I've been a part of; for example, the adventure might *say* that there are only a couple hours before the Bad Guys attack, but if the players hem and haw and plot and scheme, most GMs I've seen will permit the players to ponder their options, so long as it continues to be interesting.

For a resource to be limited, there needs to be enough of it to be considered a resource. As a example, let's say you've got a dungeon crawl where a demon appears before three doors. "You can open exactly one!" the demon proclaims, cackling maniacally. Okay; in this instance, no one would think of door-opening capability as a limited resource; it's simply a single choice. No; for door opening to be a limited resource (ironically), there needs to be the possibility to open more than one door. For example, if the PCs are in a space opera and exploring a derelict ship (a "dungeon crawl in space"), the hacker in the party might realize that he can only open 10 doors before the self-defense systems activate and destroy the ship. Now *that's* a limited resource; each door will be met with apprehension and consideration.

On a slightly more realistic example, I know many GMs who -- thinking of the limited resource of time -- will say something like, "The bad guys will storm the warehouse in two minutes." Unfortunately, most players can't formulate effective use of that time, coming up with little more than "We hide behind some crates" or "We run out the back." In this case, again, time isn't a limited resource; it's the frame of reference for a single choice. But consider something like, "You know that the vastly powerful bad guys will make an attack on your castle in three months. What do you do?" In this case, three months is enough time to come up with a plan (even an elaborate one), *but* it's not an endless amount of time. (For example, if the neighboring allied kingdom is a month away, then that permits only one round-trip to muster up additional forces.)

For a resource to be limited, it needs to be known that it's limited. If the players don't know that magic wands have charges (since it's fairly common in literature and tales for such devices to work indefinitely), then it's not a consideration of limited resources if the wand runs out; the player never had any actual chance to consider. Likewise if the heroes didn't know that the Evil Neighboring Kingdom was planning on attacking, then the time they have left isn't a limited resource (even if it *did* take three months for the bad guys to schlep over to their kingdom).

Here are some ideas -- jotted quickly and without much consideration because, hey, I'm outta here in a few hours -- to incorporate limited resources into your game:

Time

In a lot of ways, the most obvious limited resource. We all feel the pressures of a lack of time in various situations, and we all know that our days are finite on the ol' cosmic clock. The examples mentioned previously about being attacked within a certain amount of time are classic examples of time as a limited resource, as is the Big Event (you know . . . the boxing championship, the big race, the show choir event, or all three). Here are a couple more ideas for using time.

- Someone the PCs like and admire will be dying in a relatively short period (say, a week). If the person can be cured, it's a race against time. If the person can't, it's a limited resource of spending time with that individual; for example, if the person is a mentor (martial arts trainer, mystic tutor, or the like), then this might be the last chance to pass on any words of wisdom from that person.
- Alternatively, someone the heroes *don't* like will be dying shortly. In this case, maybe the heroes only have a certain amount of time to get information out of him (such as the secret to cure a long-standing problem), or -- for more character-driven campaigns -- to attempt some sort of resolution with that character. Or perhaps the villain is using the opportunity of his impending demise to "go out with a bang," plotting something big. (The Joker's looming death was the basis behind the forgettable DC comic mini-series event *Last Laugh.*)
- Finally, time can be the basis for a campaign, such as a series centered around the idea of the heroes only having a year to live.

Money

Do you want to make more money? Sure; we all do! This is another one that tends to be well-known by most people. In fact, it's probably more well-known by *gamers* than most PCs. (I, for one, tend to have an abnormal percentage of people with various high levels of wealth.) However, it can still serve as a good basis for some campaigns. The biggest obstacle is keeping the heroes from chipping in their own money or resources (assuming that's undesirable to the GM's vision); if the GM wants to prevent this, maybe the heroes' money isn't directly translatable or easily convertible in the situation. ("Here in the Mushroom Kingdom, we have no notion of this . . . Master-Card?") Or perhaps the money involved is beyond the pale when it comes to the scenario at hand; even being a billionaire doesn't mean too much if the heroes suddenly become involved with, say, designing the U.S. budget.

- The heroes are given a sum of money to accomplish some goal, such as fix up a castle/headquarters/road house. This is especially good in games (such as the base *d20 System*) which require a monetary expenditure for the creation of magic items; the heroes get a million gold specifically for the purpose of building magic items to ward off the local reign of the monstrous Foba Bett.
- Alternatively, they are given a sum of money with a direct mandate (such as being given a million gold coins with the restriction that they can't go to anyone the heroes know directly, or $100 million to devote to charitable causes).

* * *

I may well return to this topic next week, once my plane lands back in sunny (well, flat) Indiana. Until then, I hope everyone who's at GenCon has fun, and maybe you'll raise a glass or roll a crit in honor of my lack of presence.

Because, let's face it . . . I'm a limited resource.

--Steven Marsh

Omicron Polypi

for *GURPS Space*

by William H. Stoddard

Centuries in the future, the human race has established itself in dozens of solar systems. One of the newest colonies is at the solar system of Omicron Polypi, a double star with some unusual features. Both stars in the system are orbited exclusively by terrestrial worlds; there are no gas giants. Omicron Polypi A is a red dwarf; its second planet, Penelope, is one of the galaxy's comparatively rare garden worlds. Omicron Polypi B is a white dwarf, but earlier in its history it was an F5 V star, and then passed through subgiant and giant stages, during which its planets were transformed by ferocious heat. For the past 2.7 billion years, they have been at the other extreme, at cryogenic temperatures ranging from 92 K down to 24 K. During the two stars' closest approach, a distance of 25 AU, the planets of Omicron Polypi B get nearly as much light and heat from Omicron Polypi A as from their own star!

The detection of an Earthlike world attracted a consortium of colonizing organizations, Societas Mundi Viridi. Eighty years ago they staked their claim to Omicron Polypi, established their first colonies on Penelope, and set up outposts on other planets: Achilles, an ammonia planet, and Hector, an exotic large planet orbiting Omicron Polypi B. These were followed by colonies on several planets of the Omicron Polypi B subsystem, and by conflicts in both intraplanetary and interplanetary politics. As yet, none of them has reached the point of open war, but there have been several crises, and if the next one were mishandled, somebody might start shooting.

Omicron Polypi is designed to serve several purposes. It can be a setting for a continuing campaign about life on the interstellar frontier. It can also be a place for interstellar traders or diplomats to stop off and get caught up in local politics and markets. Its worlds are exotic enough to be interesting to a scientific research team. Finally, it's an example of solar system design using the **GURPS Space** design rules -- and exploring some of the interesting options within those rules.

As presented, this material assumes that faster than light travel is possible, and inexpensive enough to allow trade in luxury items and skilled services, but not in bulk goods. Much of it can be adapted, though, to a setting without FTL, where the colonists are *really* on their own.

Penelope: The Primary Colony

Settled 80 years ago, Penelope now has a population of just over half a million. The children and grandchildren of the original settlers are now in the majority, and the children are taking over leadership from their parents. Space remains accessible, thanks to the many shuttlecraft that came with the colonial fleet, but many members of Generations One, Two, and Three are mainly interested in the planetary surface.

The system is 7.8 billion years old, and its habitable zone is close to Omicron Polypi A. Penelope orbits its star at 0.20 AU. It has settled into a 3:2 resonance, in which its day is 110 standard days long, twice the length of its year. No part of its surface is permanently in the dark, but the surface temperature changes drastically between day (average noon temperature 90°F) and night (average midnight temperature 38°F). Thanks to a very small axial tilt of 2°, the temperature is only slightly colder at the poles than at the equator. On Penelope, Dawn, Day, Twilight, and Night are the names of seasons. Rainfall is heavy during Dawn and Dusk, and lighter during Day, especially in continental interiors; plants typically have a vigorous growth phase during Dawn, store up

Backstory: New Constellations

As humanity expanded through the galaxy, astronomers discovered new stars, which had been hidden from Earth by interstellar clouds, or simply too faint and far away to be seen. In systems close to Sol, astronomers simply added the stars to the familiar constellations. Farther away, newly seen stars outnumbered familiar ones, familiar stars sometimes appeared in different constellations, and the shapes of constellations were

energy during Day, and produce fruits and seeds during Twilight. Little atmospheric moisture makes it into deep Night, and most of it falls as snow or sleet rather than rain.

Given its age, Penelope has built up a lot of continental crust; just over half its surface is land. Its interior heat is too low to drive plate tectonics; its continents have stopped moving -- fortunately for its climate, they're fairly widely dispersed, not clumped into one huge arid mass. There are still a few active volcanoes, shield volcanoes somewhat like Mauna Loa on Earth. About half of these are in the oceans, where they have produced big volcanic islands; the other half are on the continents, where they tower over the level ground that surrounds them.

Penelope's age has also affected its native life. Seemingly the planet never developed a fully sapient race comparable to humanity. But with an evolutionary history 50% longer than Earth's, its larger animals have undergone an evolutionary arms race that drove many of them to high intelligence and complex behavior. The average herbivore is at least as smart as a pig; the average carnivore is comparable to a monkey. Several species are at IQ 6, the lower edge of true sapience. To add to the complexity of the situation, several long-separated continents have independently involved their own borderline sapients. How to deal with them is a big policy issue for Societas Mundi Viridi -- and a challenging practical question for human settlers who have to protect their crops from alarmingly cunning thieves.

The simple physical conditions on the surface also offer challenges. The planet's gravity is 1.3G, so an average person has 45 lbs. of encumbrance when stark naked; most people are at medium encumbrance or worse. The high gravity also puts newcomers to Penelope at 1 to DX, but this doesn't affect experienced colonists (who have two levels of Improved G-Tolerance) or their children who grew up on the planet (whose home gravity is 1.3G). Both high gravity and a dense atmosphere, with lots of neon and helium, contribute to an atmospheric pressure of 6.50 atmospheres. Penelope's oxygen level is actually somewhat low, so this is treated as Dense rather than Very Dense, giving 1 to HT rolls but avoiding the toxic effects of very high oxygen concentrations. Children raised on Penelope have a native pressure of 1.30 atmospheres and suffer no HT penalties from Penelope's atmospheric pressure, but have to acclimate to the comparatively thin atmosphere that's maintained on space stations.

The upper classes among the colonists still send their children into orbit, both for advanced education and as a rite of passage, like the traditional European tour of British aristocrats. Many colonial children remember their early weeks in orbit as a time of chronic discomfort, fatigue, and physical awkwardness. Some colonists advocate resetting all orbital facilities to Penelope's surface pressure and gravity; few people in the orbital population want to go through this change, and many of the upper classes take perverse pride in the hardships of their adolescent years, so the stations currently maintain 1.0G and 1.00 atmospheres.

Penelope's government is a corporate state, owned and operated by Societas Mundi Viridi. Administrative Rank in the corporation is an important source of Status. So is Wealth, especially in the form of corporate shares. Every adult is issued one corporate share, worth $75,000 and granting Independent Income 1 (a subsistence allowance of $750 a month) -- but he's expected to pay for it, and deductions are taken from his corporate pay or business profits until he has paid it off. This grants him the right to vote in shareholders' elections. Wealthier adults can own many shares and have extra votes. The Control Rating is 4, representing strict environmental and planetary development regulations, enforced public morality, severe punishments, and a general willingness of corporate management to interfere in people's lives; on the other hand, taxes are low and there's some regard for economic freedom. The planetary government has a Corruptibility of 1, indicating that skill in dealing with corporate management can get around the more oppressive restrictions. Technology is at TL11, but equipment available on the planet costs about 10% more than in orbit.

Penelope has a Class III spaceport. Other installations include the following: the base of operations of a smuggling organization; an espionage facility run by Societas Mundi Viridi and seeking information on criminal and underground

political movements; a large research base devoted to the ecology and evolutionary biology of indigenous life; and a meteorological research center funded by an association of landholders.

To minimize ecological impacts, the settlements on the ground have been placed on large islands close to continental landmasses; the continents themselves are reserved for scientific expeditions to explore. Orbital imaging has good enough resolution to locate unlicensed settlements, though sophisticated camouflage measures might conceal them. About 10% of the ground population is farmers and their families; another 5% is explorers, forest rangers, field ecologists, and other wilderness-oriented people. The native life is biochemically compatible with the colonists, and long-term projects are trying to identify species suitable for agriculture or fisheries.

Life in Orbit

Not all the inhabitants of the system are on Penelope's surface. The colony ships that brought them to the system are still there, mostly in orbit around Penelope. Three groups of them occupy orbits 120° apart, providing satellite radio links for communities on the planetary surface. These are not synchronous orbits; because of Penelope's slow rotation, synchronous orbit would be 279.5 planetary diameters out, a distance at which the star's gravitational influence is ten times stronger than the planet's, so that the "satellite" would actually be an independently orbiting body. Rather, the orbital clusters are 41.5 planetary diameters out and orbit Penelope ten times each planetary "day."

Most of the system's manufacturing also takes place in orbit. Government, corporate management, and higher education are mainly space-based as well. The total orbital population is 45,000. About one-third of these are support workers who maintain the orbital infrastructure. Their wealth ranges from Average to Comfortable; the corporate executives and research workers they support range from Comfortable to Wealthy, with a small upper stratum who are Very Wealthy or better.

Mining Colonies

None of the other planets of Omicron Polypi A has been colonized, but several planets of Omicron Polypi B have colonies, set up to exploit their mineral resources. Whatever their original character, all these worlds suffered catastrophic heating during the star's supergiant phase, with surface temperatures from 467 K to 1,743 K! The heat drove off their atmospheres and their surface water or ice, leaving them as bare rock, often with valuable mineral deposits. Societas Mundi Viridi began licensing mining development ventures as soon as its population was large enough to need the industrial base. All of the colonies have Struggling Wealth levels, because of the need to cope with difficult environments.

Paris (Omicron Polypi B 1) is a small rock world tide-locked to its star. Its day side is at a fairly stable 262°F. Its night side falls as low as 443°F. However, with an axial tilt of 28°, it has a large "twilight zone" that fluctuates between these extremes. In addition, the light of Omicron Polypi A is bright enough to raise its nightside temperature during the half of its 51-day year when the two stars face opposite hemispheres, to between 417°F at theirs closest approach and 433°F at their most distant. The mining sites are all on the relatively mild day side.

Paris was settled 50 years ago by a mining firm set up as a technocracy. But a combination of harsh management (Control Rating 5) and official corruption (Corruptibility 4) increasingly alienated the work force and even lower managers, provoking a massive strike 25 years ago, followed by the founding of a new government -- one that revived the ancient concept of representative democracy, with each mining site electing delegates to a Board of Directors. The new regime has Control Rating 2 and Corruptibility 1. Most assets of the former corporation were reassigned to local cooperatives as settlement for grievances. The metals and minerals that the miners produce are too valuable for Societas Mundi Viridi to stop trading with them entirely. Paris is now a low-tech colony, with 20,000 inhabitants, without much equipment above TL10.

Priam (Omicron Polypi B 2) is another tide-locked world, much like Paris, but colder and smaller. Its mineral deposits are unusually rich; a mining colony was established there 70 years ago, only a decade after the colonial fleet arrived. The operating firm, Planetmines Limited, is a harshly run but honest technocracy, with Control Rating 5 and

Corruptibility 0. Priam has 30,000 inhabitants in a few large sites, with much of the firm's output being invested in industrial growth rather than high standards of living.

Andromache (Omicron Polypi B 4) is another very small world, but has a single moonlet orbiting it. Its day is two of its years long, so it has no permanent day or night side; its average temperature is 383°F, with drastic fluctuations between day and night. Its operating firm, Song Pappas, established 60 years ago, is another technocracy, but a comparatively liberal one, with Control Rating 4 and Corruptibility 1; skill in Administration can arrange a fairly comfortable life. Its total population is now 20,000.

Cassandra (Omicron Polypi B 5) was colonized by a different sort of organization: a group of engineers who believed that open communication was the basis of scientific and technical progress. They established a political system based on such communication, carried on via a computer network -- a cybernetically based Athenian democracy. A legal system based on full disclosure of information keeps its leaders extraordinarily honest; the planet has Control Rating 4 and Corruptibility 0. Cassandra has grown slowly, and currently, 70 years after its founding, has no more than 5,000 people.

Research Stations

Achilles (Omicron Polypi A 3) is an ammonia world, a comparatively rare type of planet. Despite its harsh conditions -- a lethally toxic and corrosive atmosphere at a frigid 192°F -- it attracts planetary scientists interested in studying its unusual environment, and sometimes hoping for evidence of ammonia-based life. At 6,000 inhabitants, it's actually a larger community than Cassandra, but it remains dependent on Penelope for both government and economic aid.

Hector (Omicron Polypi B 3) is sometimes called "Penelope's twin": the two worlds have almost identical mass. But Hector has a far more exotic history. It started out as a large greenhouse world, with a hot, toxic atmosphere. During its star's long period as a giant, its surface temperature reached a peak of nearly 1,400°F, which drove off nearly all its formerly dense atmosphere, turning it into a chthonian planet. Then the transformation of its start to a white dwarf plunged its temperature to 363°F. As a result, it's now effectively a rock world, but an extraordinarily large and cold one, with a surface gravity of 1.54G.

During the chthonian episode, Hector's crust underwent massive changes, which were then frozen in place and preserved. The study of these changes became a major focus of Societas Mundi Viridi's attention 60 years ago, when a research base was established. Hector's population has grown to 10,000, but it's still primarily focused on scientific research; the planet is legally off limits to commercial exploitation and to colonization. The planet's deep gravity well makes this somewhat easier to enforce, as the cost of lifting minerals out of it makes them economically uncompetitive. The high gravity has also favored recruitment of personnel from Penelope's colonial population, who are already accustomed to a relatively high native gravity and find adapting to Hector less stressful.

Political Stresses

Politics in the Omicron Polypi system is mainly administrative rather than electoral. Societas Mundi Viridi does have a board of directors, but the shareholders have always voted to accept the directors recommended by corporate management. The ability of the wealthy to purchase additional shares

Under the Hood: The Light of Two Stars

The standard *GURPS Space* rule for calculating a planet's temperature assumes that all its light and heat come from one star. This doesn't work for Omicron Polypi B. It's so faint that its planets receive nearly as much light from Omicron Polypi A, despite its being many times farther away. So figuring their surface temperature requires taking the light of both stars into account.

Unfortunately, it's not accurate simply to figure the temperature based on each star separately, and add the two temperatures together. Temperature is proportional to the *fourth root* of luminosity, and it's the luminosities that have to be added.

So, for example, Astyanax (Omicron Polypi B 6) has a blackbody temperature of 25 K, based on its orbital radius of 3.76 AU and Omicron Polypi B's luminosity of 0.001. But it also is lit by Omicron Polypi A, which has a luminosity of 0.037. Its distance from that

and thus gain plural votes encourages a conservative approach; management would have to offend the older, wealthier, and higher ranking shareholders to have a significant chance of getting itself voted out. Ambitious men don't run for office; they manage projects and corporate divisions and build alliances within the corporate hierarchy.

The biggest ongoing debate within corporate management is between the conservers and the accelerators. Conservers generally favor keeping large parts of the system undeveloped, in the hope of larger payoffs from new scientific knowledge. Accelerators favor immediate development and rapid population growth. The issues are especially acute for the Penelope colony, which has to deal with indigenous life, including many animal species with IQ 5 or 6. To the conservers, these are potential sapient life that ought to be allowed to evolve. To the accelerators, they're dangerous animals. It's not at all a coincidence that many colonists favor acceleration, while many space dwellers favor conservation. "Footprint" is the political catchphrase for this issue: conservers want a small footprint, whereas accelerators find a bigger one acceptable.

The question of renormalizing the atmosphere and gravity in space facilities to match Penelope's surface conditions (1.3G and a dense atmosphere rich in noble gases) has become a symbol for many of these conflicts. Many Penelope colonists feel that renormalization would affirm that Penelope is the human race's home in this system, and the conditions on its surface are its new native environment. Keeping the facilities at 1.0G and standard atmospheric conditions strikes them as saying that humans will always be temporary guests on Penelope -- or that people who adapt to living there are marginal, with real civilization being elsewhere.

Currently, Achilles is the focus of a related conflict. The Wellspring Group, made up of wealthy investors with a background in high-tech projects, has submitted a proposal to open up the planet to economic development, as a source of carbon and nitrogen compounds. The staff of the current research base mostly oppose this, believing that more study of Achilles's native conditions is needed before anyone risks modifying them. Small-footprint and big-footprint factions have lined up behind the two points of view, mobilizing support for the board of directors granting or withholding a license to the Wellspring Group.

The minor colonies have their own politics, of a rather different kind. Nominally they're all licensees of Societas Mundi Viridi; practically they're sovereign states. This was made clear when Societas Mundi Viridi refused to intervene after the General Strike on Paris, stating that it was an internal issue.

Technically, what the Paris miners did was neither theft nor expropriation. The General Strike was settled by miners being seated on the board of directors of Aotaiyo Corporation as stakeholder representatives. This led to radical changes in corporate policy, including open licensing of mining claims. A miner no longer had to get corporate approval in advance to explore a site; if he presented evidence of valuable minerals, his claim would be registered automatically. Aotaiyo agreed to divest itself of many of its subsidiary ventures, and ended up as one business corporation among many on the planet it once ruled -- without any actual fighting, though there was certainly political and economic pressure. The managers of Planetmines Limited and Song Pappas have taken this as a warning, and are trying to make sure their own employees don't follow suit. Planetmines in particular is bitterly hostile to the new regime on Paris. The cooperative on Cassandra regards it much more sympathetically, having already set up a democratic political system of its own.

Ironically, Priam and Paris are in agreement on one big issue: Both worlds adhere to the accelerator viewpoint very strongly. Andromache's government also generally supports this viewpoint, whereas Cassandra's leans to the

star varies as the two stars orbit each other; their closest approach is 25 AU. Astyanax is sometimes closer to Omicron Polypi that that and sometimes farther, but it averages the same distance, which is close enough for an estimate. The blackbody temperature for luminosity 0.037 and radius 25 AU is 24 K.

To combine these two luminosities, we can raise the two blackbody temperatures to the fourth power, add them, and take the fourth root. The result is 29 K, only a few degrees hotter than either star's light separately would account for -- a lot less than their sum, which is 49 K! The average surface temperature is 97% of this, or 48 K.

This formula works for any two blackbody temperatures. Take them to the fourth power (that is, square them twice); add them; and take the fourth root (that is, take the square root twice).

conservers.

Attitudes

Here's a quick summary of how the colonies look to each other:

Penelope: To Paris, a stifling bureaucracy, most of whose people can't appreciate real freedom. To Priam, a sleeping giant that lacks the will to be a real threat. To Andromache, a useful but bafflingly complex and corrupt market. To Cassandra, a society lacking in ideals.

Paris: To Penelope, a tolerable evil, providing a useful safety valve for rebellious impulses. To Priam, a mob society run by a gang of thieves. To Andromache, an outlaw regime, but not a dangerous one. To Cassandra, a subject of mixed feelings -- their democratic institutions are admirable, but their wildcat frontier capitalism is dubious.

Priam: To Penelope, an overregimented society, but not a real threat. To Paris, a boastful crew who can't function without a foreman to tell them what to do. To Andromache, a case study in bad management and poor morale. To Cassandra, a potential threat that somebody ought to put a stop to -- somebody other than Cassandra, if possible.

Andromache: To Penelope, the one real success story among the licensees. To Paris, worthy of grudging respect for honest dealing and keeping their agreements. To Priam, a lot of inefficient idealists who don't know how to get things done. To Cassandra, a valuable trade partner; they show that business management doesn't have to be unethical.

Cassandra: To Penelope, a valuable source of ideas, and also a place to send overidealistic young people. To Paris, a lot of weird intellectuals, but at least they have some regard for freedom. To Priam, a waste of resources on impractical ideals. To Andromache, a potential trade partner, but frustrating to deal with because of their insistence on debating everything publicly.

Seed Crystals

GMs wanting to use Omicron Polypi in a campaign may find the following approaches useful. First, some approaches that will work for a group of interstellar visitors, as an episode in a larger campaign:

Cargo: A free trader learns of trade opportunities at Omicron Polypi (if necessary, they can be lured there by a contract to haul a consignment there). Suitable cargoes include most sorts of current high-tech equipment, especially ecosurveillance devices, up-to-date medical supplies and equipment, and computer hardware; if they want bulk cargoes, insystem drives and mining machinery would be salable. When they arrive at Omicron Polypi, they find a well-established orbital marketplace -- but they also come in contact with representative of other worlds who would like to trade with them directly; smugglers selling products outside the regulated corporate trade channels, or prohibited goods such as Penelopean fossils; and government representatives from Priam or Paris who would like to purchase military gear from other systems. Which of these gray and black market channels they take a chance on

Under the Hood: Hector's Thermal History

Over the course of its lifetime, Omicron Polypi B went through several stages with different luminosities. As a main sequence star and a subgiant, it had luminosity 4.5. When it became a giant, its luminosity was 25 times as high, or 112.5. Now, as a white dwarf, it has luminosity 0.001.

This drastically altered the conditions on all of its planets. But the changes were biggest on its third planet, Hector.

Hector is a large planet, orbiting 0.77 AU from its star. During Omicron Polypi B's early life, this gave it a blackbody temperature of 462 K, which made it a greenhouse planet. But when Omicron Polypi B became a giant, Hector's blackbody temperature rose to 1,032 K, well into the chthonian range. The intense heat drove away Hector's atmosphere, leaving it with only a trace of gases replenished by solar wind. At the same time, much of Hector's crust melted. Then Omicron Polypi B diminished to a white dwarf, dropping Hector to its current blackbody temperature of 56 K. Normally this would make it an ice world, but with its atmosphere already driven off, it has nothing to form ice with. Instead it becomes an anomalously cold rock world. The other planets that orbit Omicron Polypi B had comparable, but less extreme

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is up to the merchants.

Surgical Strike: An interstellar mercenary company gets a new contract: The Directorate of Priam have grown frustrated with Societas Mundi Viridi's hands-off treatment of Paris and decided to take matters into their own hands. But they don't have significant military capabilities, and building up some would be a long-term project. Instead, they're willing to fund an expedition to take over the key points in Paris's infrastructure. They don't see a need to forcibly subdue every mine on the planet; they think it will be sufficient to control the spacelaunch facilities and the technical infrastructure, denying independents both access to vital service and the trade that would pay for it. They haven't worked out the details; coming up with a proposal is part of the mercenaries' job.

Next, some approaches to running a campaign based in the system:

Academic Questions: A group of young people arrive at one of the orbital stations above Penelope, ready to begin training for a career as "truck drivers" -- pilots for the relatively small shuttlecraft that transport goods and colonists about the system, perform research and humanitarian missions, and keep watch for illegalities. They come from varied backgrounds: natives of the orbital stations, colonists from Penelope struggling to adapt to the thin air and low gravity, and transfers from the smaller colony worlds. The campaign should combine character interplay, increasingly difficult training assignments, and actual adventure scenarios.

Groundbreakers: A new island on Penelope has been opened to human settlement, and the first farm grants are being made. A group of colonists set up a homestead, build shelters and greenhouses, and start trying to establish a viable farm, despite shortages, unpredictable wildlife, and bureaucratic regulations.

Invasion: A group of Paris miners get bad news: An interstellar mercenary force has seized control of their planet's spaceport and all its regional centers. They've ordered the miners to come in and submit to a new government -- one that's rumored to be backed by Priam. Will the miners cooperate, try to survive and go unnoticed, or join the resistance? And if they don't cooperate, how will they get their ore to market, and what will they do for health care, food supplements, and spare parts?

The Omicron Polypi System

Here is a summary of the major objects in the Omicron Polypi system in *GURPS Space* terms:

Primary Star (Omicron Polypi A): Spectral type M3 V, mass 0.35 solar masses, age 7.8 billion years, effective temperature 3,400 kelvins, luminosity 0.037 solar luminosities, radius 0.0025 AU.

Orbit 1 (Agamemnon): Orbital radius 0.05 AU, diameter 5,900 miles, density 0.70, mass 0.28, blackbody temperature 545 kelvins, world type Small (Rock). No major moons.

Orbit 2 (Penelope): Orbital radius 0.20 AU, diameter 11,500 miles, density 0.90, mass 2.74, blackbody temperature 273 kelvins, world type Large (Garden). No major moons.

Orbit 3 (Achilles): Orbital radius 0.37 AU, diameter 7,000 miles, density 0.5, mass 0.34, blackbody temperature 201 kelvins, world type Standard (Ammonia). No major moons.

Orbit 4 (Menelaus): Orbital radius 0.66 AU, diameter 1,500 miles, density 0.8, mass 0.005, blackbody temperature 150 kelvins, world type Tiny (Rock). No major moons.

Orbit 5 (Nestor): Orbital radius 1.19 AU, diameter 3,800 miles, density 0.4, mass 0.044, blackbody temperature 112 kelvins, world type Small (Ice). No major moons (but two moonlets).

Orbit 6 (Ajax): Orbital radius 2.14 AU, diameter 1,400 miles, density 0.5, mass 0.003, blackbody temperature 83 K, world type Tiny (Ice). No major moons.

Orbit 7 (Odysseus): Orbital radius 3.86 AU, diameter 4,800 miles, density 1.0, mass 0.23, blackbody temperature 62 K, world type Large (Ice). One major moon: Athena -- Standard (Ice).

Orbit 8 (Asteroid Belt): Orbital radius 6.96 AU, world type Asteroid Belt.

Secondary Star (Omicron Polypi B): Spectral type D, mass 1.00 solar masses, age 7.8 billion years, effective temperature 6,600 kelvins, luminosity 0.001 solar luminosities, radius 0.0001 AU.

Orbit 1 (Paris): Orbital radius 0.27 AU, diameter 6,300 miles, density 0.8, mass 0.41, blackbody temperature 95 kelvins, world type Small (Rock). No major moons.

Orbit 2 (Priam): Orbital radius 0.45 AU, diameter 870 miles, density 0.8, mass 0.0011, blackbody temperature 73 kelvins, world type Tiny (Rock). No major moons.

Orbit 3 (Hector): Orbital radius 0.77 AU, diameter 11,100 miles, density 1.0, mass 2.74, blackbody temperature 56 kelvins, world type Large (Rock). No major moons.

Orbit 4 (Andromache): Orbital radius 1.30 AU, diameter 710 miles, density 0.7, mass 0.0005, blackbody temperature 43 kelvins, world type Tiny (Rock). No major moons (but one moonlet).

Orbit 5 (Cassandra): Orbital radius 2.21 AU, diameter 3,700 miles, density 0.7, mass 0.07, blackbody temperature 33 kelvins, world type Small (Rock). No major moons (but three moonlets).

Orbit 6 (Astyanax): Orbital radius 3.76 AU, diameter 480 miles, density 0.9, mass 0.0002, blackbody temperature 25 kelvins, world type Tiny (Rock). No major moons.

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Ghosts of Bhuvarlok

by Paul Drye

After Paul Van Zandt discovered parachronics, one of the first things tried was inter-timeline colonization. Government was one of the few things Infinity couldn't interfere with directly, and that was attractive to countries jockeying for power in the new set up.

Unfortunately for them, this isn't the 1800s. Without growing populations and occasional economic crashes, there's not a lot of people willing or able to start new lives. In countries that could afford a colony, populations are stable, and there's little money in the countries that have would-be colonists. Ideology turned out to be one of the few things that could drive a new settlement -- Lysander and Uhuru are proof of that pathway. Without it, efforts were doomed to failure.

The Indian government has become less prone to funding white elephants the last few decades, but it looked as if they'd come up with a paragon in Bhuvarlok. A series of bad decisions left the colony in imminent danger of failure, and India then had to look around for an angle that would save it. They found one. Time Tours started investing in the timeline, taken with the timeline's romantic jungles and untouched swamps dotted with ancient monuments. While it was only a middling venture by their standards, the new money was a godsend to the colony. What started as India's jewel in the crown started paying for itself with lowly tourism. In the last two years it's finally reached the take-off point, and while visitors are still a big part of Bhuvarlok's economy, it's diversifying and on its way to being one of out-time's notable successes.

History

All colony worlds are Quantum-5 timelines empty of native humans. Bhuvarlok is unusual as H. sapiens did evolve, but appears to have become extinct with nothing past bronze age civilization. There are monumental city ruins all over South Asia (and probably elsewhere, though no one's looked yet outside of the timeline's other small colony in North America). It's difficult to pin down exactly what happened, though, as none of the discovered civilizations have been matched with Homeline's early cultures. About all that Infinity has been able to determine is that the current year is 1532 and that there aren't any natives anywhere despite intensive cross-checking. There may be a few thousand hunter-gatherers clustered in some obscure part of the world, but as far as anyone can tell this Earth is empty.

Bhuvarlok was targeted by several countries as a potential colony, but the archaeological sites in Mesopotamia disqualified it until Homeline could be sure there was no one home. By the time this was certain, the Security Council five had picked other lines, leaving Bhuvarlok open for any lesser nation that wanted it. India stepped up to the plate. With a huge population and a cadre of technologically trained people, it seemed like as good a fit as any country in the world.

The theory was difficult to turn into practice. Bureaucracy and pollyannaish optimism hamstrung the effort from the beginning. One minority faction of the government wanted Bhuvarlok to be the epitome of Hindu life, based on some idealized version of the Vedas. The main pro-colonial faction wanted a propaganda coup, a clean, visibly prosperous place India could tout -- an ominous idea when what Bhuvarlok needed first was boring, basic infrastructure. Even the army stuck in its oar, looking to send forces there for no discernable reason other than putting a claim into the colonial budget.

The worst single decision was to offer cash incentives to the educated, in the hopes of attracting them out-time. The plan worked, but in working nearly doomed the colony. Any new settlement needs someone to feed it, and the farmers Bhuvarlok needed were specifically discouraged from emigrating. The people who came instead were unmarried university graduates, often male to the detriment of the sex ratio, who ended up underemployed. Agronomists became subsistence farmers, engineers drove trucks, teachers ran commissaries. Many of them soon turned to saving all their money to buy a ticket home.

Time Tours, Ltd.

Things started to change when a popular natural history magazine published a photo essay on the timeline's abandoned cities. Time Tours took notice of the resulting small burst of public interest, and eventually settled on Bhuvarlok as a venture. The company's angle is to focus on a very particular type of tourist, the ones interested in wilderness expeditions to untouched jungles and extinct, primitive civilizations.

The investment they brought made all the difference to the colony. Like had happened in the past, there was now something lucrative for the colonists to do; Virginia had tobacco, California had gold, and Bhuvarlok has tourists. With the new capital, the government could afford to build roads and hospitals while still keeping up the more glittering projects (like nice government buildings) required by Homeline India. The subsidiary work brought by Time Tours, such as keeping the helicopters and boats running, providing food and services to the tourists, and doing office work, was better suited the more-educated original colonists. Homeline even unbent enough to start sending some farmers and construction workers.

As of this year, the permanent population of Bhuvarlok is 353,000, with 150 to 175 new immigrants a day; tourists passing through at any one time number a few thousand more. The latter is a very small number compared to important destinations like Johnson's Rome, but visitors are usually quite rich -- or at least blow a lot of money on expensive jaunts -- and stay for several weeks.

The Duncorne Foundation

Beside Time Tours, Bhuvarlok has one other important group of out-time visitors. There aren't many of them, but they drive a number of expeditions into the wilderness.

Groups in several quarters have noticed that Bhuvarlok has more than its fair share of reality shards: it's in the top ten percent of all timelines for sheer quantity. Considering that all the other lead contenders are civilized lines where it's not too hard to track shards down by browsing museums and reading scientific literature, Bhuvarlok is even more of an anomaly. Its shards have been discovered by nothing more than the few humans who've explored the subcontinent in detail. This has especially interested the Duncorne Foundation, who have set up an informal relationship with Time Tours through a couple of shell corporations and contacts with executives who aren't in Infinity's pocket.

Statistical analysis of what's been found suggests that Bhuvarlok may ultimately yield more reality shards than any other two timelines put together. The Foundation intends to be the one to benefit from this.

Duncorne's personnel also have one other ace up their sleeves. Up until now, they're the only ones to discover that Bhuvarlok is not a no-mana timeline. While the largest portions of this Earth are, the abandoned cities will occasionally "flare up" and be low-mana areas for a little while. Now that they know to look, there are even tantalizing hints that there was once much more magic in this world. Unfortunately for the Foundation, this is somewhat

misleading itself.

The Ghosts

In the last few years, however, some are coming to suspect that there's more to Bhuvarlok's past than the presence of the shards suggests. Peculiar and contradictory reports are starting to come back from people who've headed deep into the colony's claimed lands. For the longest time expeditions to the interior were very rare, solely because it was hard to explore any place in detail. Helicopters and whatnot could buzz an area quickly, but the growth was so thick it was nearly impossible to land. Even walking, though possible, meant hacking a route through the vegetation, and in some places it was difficult to make even one mile a day.

Now that a few sites are opened up, though, and Time Tours is actively encouraging people to explore away from the coasts and rivers, people are encountering ghosts (for lack of a better term). The prevailing attitude is that there's a reasonable explanation, probably involving loneliness-crazy trailbreakers getting a little too deep into their cups. The forest runners stand by what they've encountered despite this, and they're starting to convince others.

Generally speaking, all the reports are of human activity -- or at least the remains of it -- but often vague and certainly hard to prove. People in the old cities hear voices in unknown languages, especially at night; others might smell cooking smoke or even come across the fresh remains of a campfire. Objects move when no one is watching them, and sometimes artifacts will be found where one person will swear there was nothing before. In three cases, entire blocks of cities have been mapped differently twice, with no good explanation for how the first map could have been wrong. One infamous story from a tourist, now the darling of the fringe-science types, tells of how she studied a miraculously inhabited site through binoculars for more than an hour only to find that it was abandoned like all the others when she got close.

The Colony

India has claimed a continent-sized chunk of land, essentially everything from the Indus River in the west to the Irrawady in the east. This includes a fair bit of land belonging to Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Burma on Homeline, and the latter two countries have protested to Infinity and the UN. To date, nothing has come of this, though there are rumors that the Patrol is watching for signs that the Indians are infiltrating Pakistan by parachronic means.

The point of entry to Bhuvarlok from Homeline is Navapattana, on the Kaveri River about 40 kilometers south of Bangalore. The Indian government picked the site as the best combination between the two timelines: Bangalore on Homeline is a high-tech center, and the Kaveri in Bhuvarlok serves as a basic transportation artery that also waters good agricultural land.

The capital city is home to some 35,000 people, easily the largest settlement in all of Bhuvarlok. It's devoted entirely to governing the huge area claimed by the colony, and dispersing settlers throughout it. There are two dozen more "hub villages" scattered throughout the subcontinent, each with up to a few thousand settlers, which provide hospitals and other services to numerous farming hamlets around them. The total population of all of Bhuvarlok is just under half a million people. This is very few people for the area they're scattered across, but India's hope is that the towns will serve as seeds for much more settlement despite being very isolated now.

Navapattana is built on a radial pattern, reminiscent of other planned capitals like Brasilia and old Washington D.C., if on a much smaller scale. Whatever other failings Bhuvarlok may have, Navapattana has benefited from its lack of people: its streets are wide and houses are spaced out in a direct contrast to typical Indian cities. Electricity, telephone, and sanitation services are all good by Indian standards, though still behind what's common in the west. The most notable thing about the city is a near complete lack of cars: the Homeline government has discouraged them on the theory that there are too few people in the colony so far to keep them fueled and repaired economically. There are some motorized scooters, many bicycles, and two bus lines that cover the main north-south and east-west axes of the city. Fortunately, the entire capital is just under two miles across, so most places are within a half hour's walk.

Characters

"Professor" Christopher Nessel: Nessel is the Duncorne Foundation's man on the ground in Bhuvarlok. It's his responsibility to keep an eye on the tourist groups when they return, collate any strange stories they have, and try to purchase any artifacts that look like they might be unusual in some way.

He is a typical-looking academic of Scottish origin. The professor is nearly bald with white hair where any is left, and a large walrus moustache that makes it hard to see his mouth even when he's talking, which isn't helpful in combination with his strong Scots accent. His bulging forehead is enhanced by his strong glasses, which seem to make his blue eyes recede several feet behind the rest of his head. He was an active agent for several years in the 2010s, but caught a drug-resistant form of tuberculosis while out-time and nearly died. After several years of recovering and doing light lecture duty at the University of Edinburgh, he returned to the field with this assignment last year.

Nessel is very fussy, and with a weather eye for the big payoff -- both academic and monetary. He is personally poor after his long illness, but will do what he can to fix that. He won't definitely take up a chance at corruption, but that's the way to bet.

Note that, as written up below, Nessel has Magery 0. This is intended to model a knack that he has for distinguishing reality shards from mundane artifacts, one of the reasons he's been sent to Bhuvarlok. This is predicated on the standard Infinite Worlds assumption, that Homeline knows magic exists, and some Homeliners are learning to work with it. If the GM has reduced or removed magic in a quest for a more hard-science feel to the campaign, remove this advantage. Nessel is not supposed to be particularly note-worthy in any field.

Christopher Nessel   *145 points*

Human

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 14 [80]; **HT** 9 [-10].
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 14 [0]; Per 14 [0]; FP 9 [0].
Basic Speed 4.75 [0]; Basic Move 4 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 7; Parry 0.

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].
CF: Indian [1]; Western (Native) [0].
Languages: Ancient Chinese (None/Literate) [2]; English (Accented) [-2]; French (Broken) [2]; Hindi (Broken/None) [1]; Latin (Broken) [2]; Sanskrit (None/Literate) [2].

Advantages

Claim to Hospitality (Universities) 2 [2]; Contact Group (Duncorne Foundation) (Effective Skill 12) (Somewhat Reliable; 9 or less) [5]; Lightning Calculator [2]; Magery 0 [5].

Disadvantages

Curious (12 or less) [-5]; Pacifism (Reluctant Killer) [-5]; Selfish (12 or less) [-5]; Unfit [-5].
Quirks: Coughs and clears his throat all the time; Distinctive Feature ((Huge Moustache)); Prefers to be called "Professor" even though he isn't any more [-3].

Skills

Anthropology-13 (IQ-1) [2]; Archaeology-16 (IQ+2) [12]; Artist (Drawing)-14 (IQ+0) [4]; Biology/TL8-11 (IQ-3) [1]; Cartography/TL8-13 (IQ-1) [1]; Computer Operation/TL8-15 (IQ+1) [2]; Driving/TL8 (Automobile)-13 (DX+3) [12]; Fast-Talk-14 (IQ+0) [2]; Guns/TL8 (Pistol)-11 (DX+1) [2]; History (Ancient Asia)-15 (IQ+1) [8]; Linguistics-12 (IQ-2) [1]; Occultism-15 (IQ+1) [4]; Public Speaking-14 (IQ+0) [2]; Research/TL8-16 (IQ+2) [8]; Savoir-Faire (High Society)-14 (IQ+0) [1]; Speed-Reading-14 (IQ+0) [2]; Survival (Jungle)-15 (Per+1) [4]; Survival (Tropical Lagoon)-13 (Per-1) [1]; Swimming-9 (HT+0) [1]; Teaching-15 (IQ+1) [4]; Writing-14 (IQ+0) [2].

Fairfax Ghosh: One of the best people Time Tours has out in the field, Fairfax is a Keralan university graduate with a degree in forestry. After several discouraging years trying to conserve the rain forests in Homeline's Western Ghats, he emigrated to Bhuvarlok. Two lean years followed, but he stayed on after falling in love with the pristine wilds of his new home. After Time Tours came to Bhuvarlok his material situation improved for the better, since he's an excellent tour guide for those looking to eco-tour, or explore the lost cities up and down the subcontinent's west coast.

When he was younger, Fairfax became interested in the literature of the Raj, including Kipling, Forster, and Orwell. From there he expanded out into other colonial writers like Haggard and Conrad. He's got an excellent grasp of the romantic side to the Indian jungle, especially as perceived by Westerners, and he uses it. Most of the time he presents as a weird mixture of Quatermain-style adventurer and sepoy mysticism; his main difficulty is not rolling his eyes as his tourist charges eat it up.

Ghosh is a very dark-skinned, Keralan Indian, clean-shaven with dark hair combed back over his head. He is very fit and broad-shouldered from a combination of a winning ticket in the genetic lottery and a lifetime of outdoor work. With his good looks he could cut a swath through the female half of the tourists under his care, but he generally tries to avoid this.

He is also the one person to seek out if interested in the ghosts. Unfortunately for Fairfax, he was one of the first people to report them, and since few believe they actually exist he's acquired a bit of a reputation as a nut (if a pleasant one who causes no harm). He's given up talking about them now, but will open up if he feels someone won't make fun of him.

Fairfax Ghosh   *165 points*

Human

ST 11 [10]; *DX* 12 [40]; *IQ* 11 [20]; *HT* 11 [10].
Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 14 [15]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 6 [5]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 9; Parry 0.

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].
CF: Indian (Native) [0]; Victorian English [1]; Western [1].
Languages: English (Accented) [4]; Malayalam (Native) [0].

Advantages

Appearance (Attractive) [4]; Fit [5]; Patrons (Time Tours) 2 (12 or less; Less useful resources) [15]; Unfazeable [15].

Disadvantages

Chummy [-5]; Code of Honor (Professional) [-5]; Dependent (Current Tourist Group) (No more than 100%) (Constantly; Group of Dependents; Employer/Acquaintance) [-4]; Overconfidence (12 or less) [-5]; Reputation (Sees ghosts) -1 (Almost everyone; All the time) [-5]; Truthfulness (12 or less) [-5]; Workaholic [-5].

Quirks: Always in the middle of reading some old book; Careful; Puts on 19th-century manners [-3].

Skills

Area Knowledge (Western India)-13 (IQ+2) [4]; Biology/TL8 (Forestry)-14 (IQ+3) [16]; Camouflage-13 (IQ+2) [1]; Electronics Operation/TL8 (Surveillance)-11 (IQ+0) [2]; First Aid/TL8 (Human)-13 (IQ+2) [4]; Guns/TL8 (Rifle)-14 (DX+2) [4]; Hiking-13 (HT+2) [8]; Stealth-13 (DX+1) [4]; Survival (Island/Beach)-13 (Per-1) [1]; Survival (Jungle)-15 (Per+1) [4]; Survival (Plains)-13 (Per-1) [1]; Survival (Swampland)-13 (Per-1) [1]; Survival (Woodlands)-13 (Per-1) [1]; Tracking-14 (Per+0) [2]; Traps/TL8-12 (IQ+1) [4].

Adventure Seeds

Bhuvarlok is so underpopulated that, apart from the ghosts, adventures are normally struggles against an uncaring, implacable nature:

- A cyclone steams up the Bay of Bengal, threatening several towns in the Ganges Delta. The difficulty is what to do about it. Evacuation is impossible due to lack of roads, and water transport would be too dangerous. It is soon discovered that long-term disaster preparations (shelters, dikes, and the like) have been neglected by an incompetent local official. The towns -- and the characters -- will have to improvise a way to ride out the stages of the storm, including the slowly rising winds and the flooding to follow. Afterwards, desperate measures will be needed to rescue people and vital equipment,
- A distant town is suffering from a sudden epidemic, and medical supplies there are strained. The government in Navapattana has requisitioned one of Time Tours' three transport helicopters (which are obsolescent, but the best available in time) for a mercy flight, as well as a motley collection of people who have skills that might be useful. The copter must be flown for its full range (800 miles), set down for the night, then refueled from a cache of gasoline before following a second leg to its destination. Naturally, the cache is a for-emergency-use-only drop made a year ago in the middle of nowhere. No one is even sure it's still there, and even if it is, landing and securing the site in what is untouched wilderness is going to take some effort.
- Time Tours naturally wants to expand its roster of sites to visit. If the adventurers have the wilderness skills and the time off from their regular duties, they can make a large chunk of cash (or persuade Time Tours to offer some quid pro quo) by blazing a trail to a new abandoned city and mapping the most impressive buildings. All may be normal in the city they pick, but given the kind of luck the explorers usually have, what are the odds of that? The ghosts may be out in force, or something more mundane like crosstime smugglers might have set up shop.

What Happened Here?

Bhuvarlok's hauntings are a mystery that doesn't necessarily need to be solved -- if nothing else, it's a good thing to pull out if one's group is feeling a little too cocky. However, if they're the sort of players who will keep beating their heads against the problem until it's cracked (or if the GM just wants to stay consistent in the mysteries posed), Bhuvarlok does have one cause behind all its oddities.

To understand the timeline's real history, one needs to link two apparently disjointed facts: It has some mana now but it once had much more, and all of its civilizations died out while they were still quite primitive. The connection is a talented mage experimenting with spells for traveling to the past. On his first trip a minor grandfather paradox kicked off a reality quake up and down the timeline's history, and the resulting wreck was strewn with reality shards. The timeline's high mana levels powered the disaster, draining magic down to nothing. Magic-enabled beings (such as manticores and mermaids, but also including humans) were blotted out of the new history, and Bhuvarlok's magic-oriented technology disappeared in a puff of smoke. So much eldritch power poured into the quake that it still rumbles slightly, and echoes of the former time -- the ghosts -- still pop up here and there to the mystification of present-day visitors.

If it becomes necessary to reveal all this, there are two possibilities. Cracking the case might require the Duncorne Foundation to make the discoveries, with the adventurers merely handling the consequences. Alternatively the shade of the transgressing magician can pass on the necessary information to bemused players. The history of Bhuvarlok is too turned back on itself to fall to just casual investigation.

Using Bhuvarlok In Other Settings

The key to Bhuvarlok is making the players feel isolated in the face of a wilderness that doesn't even know they exist. A sense of smallness and a need for self-reliance is paramount. Settlement is no more than little lifeboats of civilization in a sea of mindless danger, and there's abundant evidence (in the lost cities) that that approach has failed completely before.

Science-fiction campaigns will integrate with Bhuvarlok easily, as colonization adventures are common in that kind of setting. Players will have to get the hang of keeping a narrow focus when the colonization ship leaves, leaving behind shuttles and FTL drive for slow cross-country marches. They are on their own, at least some of the time. About the only change the GM may want to consider is the ultimate source of the ghosts. In an SF environment, it may make more sense to use a lost alien civilization rather than previous humans, unless there's some deep history or lost Empire that can supply the necessary antiquity.

Fantasy campaigns can use Bhuvarlok as a new land for the adventurers to visit. Advance your model from the middle ages to the very early renaissance and over-ocean voyages to new, jungle-infested lands enter the realm of possibility. A few fly-blown villages cling to the shore, but the vast interior beckons with riches in one hand and death in the other. Consider relaxing the "no-mana" rule of the original Bhuvarlok so adventurers can do what they usually do (just as Infinity agents will still have guns and other technological equipment). Bear in mind, though, that after a certain power level is reached characters with magic will have too many skills intrinsic to themselves to be threatened like a 21st-century technophile will be.

Pulp campaigns can follow the themes of Bhuvarlok easiest of all. A major class of 19th century literature was about the events when European civilization impacted what was (to many European minds) empty Africa. The GM's major chore will be to pick a style: H. Rider Haggard, or Joseph Conrad. Adventure, either rollicking or harrowing, awaits.

Icosahedron Adventures

The Sand Lords' Agonizing Thirst

by Owen K.C. Stephens

Many fantasy *d20 System* campaigns are set up as struggles between groups, with a small set of species presented as the "bad guys." Numerous species have been cast in this role, but most are either subterranean variations of surface types or unearthly creatures with too many eyes, tentacles, or arms. To broaden the possible range of racial foes, this article presents an evil plant, the sand lord, that even vegetarians can feel good about killing off. The species is opposed to the existence of most other species, and works to not only kill them but to destroy their homelands' ability to support them.

Sand Lord

The creature stands 10 feet tall, its body a single thick trunk held up by a dozen roots. Its surface is covered in dry-looking hide dotted with clusters of long, thin spines. Numerous blade-shaped leaves form a crown at the top of its trunk, and just below them is a ring of small, black dots. It rustles, though there is no breeze, and begins to crawl along the sand with its many root-like legs.

Sand Lord CR 9
NE Large Plant (Fire)
Init +3; **Senses** Listen +14, Spot +14; low-light vision, tremorsense 60 ft.
Languages Giant, Ignan, Infernal

AC 24, touch 12, flat-footed 21
hp 126 (12 HD)
Immune acid, critical hits, fire, mind-affecting effects, poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning
Fort +14, **Ref** +7, **Will** +11
Weaknesses Takes half again (+50%) damage from cold

Speed 10 ft. (2 squares), awkward
Melee slam +16 (1d8+12 and 1d6 dehydration) [+9 base, +8 Str, -1 size] or
Melee slam +12 (1d8+20 and 1d6 dehydration) [+9 base, +8 Str, -1 size, -4 Power Attack] or
Ranged +11/+11/+11/+11 (1d4+8) [+9 base, +3 Dex, -1 size]
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.
Base Atk +9; **Grapple** +17 (awkward)
Atk Options Combat Reflexes, Improved Bull Rush, Power Attack

Abilities Str 26, Dex 16, Con 22, Int 17, Wis 25, Cha 19
SQ acidic sap, awkward, dehydrating blow, desiccate, flurry of needles, plant traits
Feats: Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Improved Bull Rush, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack
Skills: Bluff +14, Hide +12, Knowledge (geography) +8, Knowledge (nature) +15, Listen +14, Sense Motive +20, Spot +14, Survival +17

- **Acidic Sap (Ex):** A sand lord's body produces extremely toxic acid it uses as sap. Any creature that damages a sand lord when within 10 feet of it risks being hit by the acid as it sprays from a wound. Such creatures must make a DC 22 Reflex save or take 2d6 points of acid damage. A creature only takes damage from this ability once per turn. This save is Con based.
- **Awkward (Ex):** Sand lords are awkward creatures, lacking arms and moving on numerous short root-like legs. As a result a sand lord can't make any Climb or Jump checks. The creatures are simply unable to take any

movement that requires these skill checks. Additionally their lack of true arms or hands limits them to holding a single item at a time, and causes them to suffer a -4 penalty to grapple checks.

- **Dehydrating Blow (Ex):** Direct physical contact with a sand lord sucks water out of a target, dealing an additional 1d6 points of damage. This damage does not apply against creatures without a normal physiological need for water (typically those creatures immune to critical hits, except plants). The dehydration damage cannot be restored until the target has drunk at least one pint of water for every 10 hit points dealt.
- **Desiccate (Ex):** Sand lords absorb moisture from the air and ground as they pass, turning any area they spend several days within to desert. An adult sand lord can destroy the casual water found in a acre of typical forest in a day, killing all the mundane plants therein. If attacking a pool of water a sand lord can go through 25,000 gallons of water in 10 minutes (the amount held in a typical swimming pool). When faced with a large body or water or a major river, a sand lord must turn to political or military options to overcome the hated liquid.
- **Flurry of Needles (Ex):** As a standard action, a sand lord may make four ranged attacks with its sharp needles. Its needles have a range increment of 100 ft., and making ranged attacks with them does not provoke an attack of opportunity. A sand lord has the ability to grow needles very quickly, and an individual can make hundreds of attacks before running low on ammunition.

Sand Lord

Sand lords are intelligent, evil plants that hate water and all life dependign on fresh water. They work to destroy fresh water and fresh-water-based life forms whenever possible, though they are intelligent enough to accept the limitations of their abilities. They have no aversion to salt water, and accept creatures able to live on salt water as allies, though they remain uncomfortable too near large bodies of salt water. Sand lords see themselves as the pinnacle of plant development, and as a result hate and seek to destroy all other thinking plant life.

Second only to their hatred of water, sand lords crave power. Many set themselves up as satraps over stretches of desert, and their ability to destroy oasis and arable land allows them to claim territory from civilized humanoids in a permanent way. When unable to conquer a territory, a sand lord may blackmail smaller communities to pay tribute or suffer a loss of water and crops.

Strategies and Tactics

A sand lord often has a few ogres (preferably some variant of sea ogre that can survive on salt water) or similar creatures serving as bodyguards, or may even be the ruling force behind a ogre warband. As long as it's allowed to destroy vegetation, a sand lord is happy to form a partnership with creatures of similar power, and may be found in the company of an efreet or fire giant. A sand lord hates operating by itself, and works to gain minions if possible, form partnerships if the opportunity arises, and serve a master only if it must to gain aid and protection. Sand lords hate all other forms of plant life, and never work with other plants (even sentient sea plants).

Slow-moving and vulnerable to being out-maneuvered, sand lords prefer ranged conflicts where their endless supply of needles gives them considerable firepower. The cunning plants prefer ambushes or fights in terrain that makes it difficult for foes to surround them. They are aware of their maneuvering limitations, and avoid rocky areas whenever possible. If pressed and clearly losing a fight, a sand lord will offer to negotiate, hoping to buy its way out of danger. The voice of a sand lord is brittle, like the rustling of old leaves.

Sand lords see the value of spells and magic, and often seek to use arcane means to protect them from cold damage. Sand lords have a healthy respect for the power of spellcasters, and treat them with greater deference than warriors or sneaks. A sand lord targets spellcasters first if it is able, but if non-caster foes make that difficult the sand lord focuses on eliminating the defenders as a step to overcoming the spellcasters they protect.

Ecology

Sand lords are plants, and thus need not sleep. They do need to eat (absorbing nutrition through their roots), normally settling for what can be found in the soil but able to absorb small animals as well. A sand lord has an amazing

capacity to absorb and destroy water but actually requires none to survive.

Sand lords procreate by splitting in half, the husk of an old desertmarker cracking to produce two fully-grown, adult sand lords with most of the memories of their "parent." Sand lords can live to be 200 years old, but can have memories dating back thousands of years. New sand lords see themselves as distinct from their ancestors, but acknowledge a level of kinship with those born of the same elders.

Environment

Sand lords seek lush wooded or jungle regions, and go about turning them into deserts. Because a sand lord can absorb vast quantities of water, destroying moisture found in the air and soil, the prolonged presence of one actually changes terrain slowly into an arid desert. As a result they can be found in nearly any moderate or hot wilderness (though only the most dedicated sand lord would challenge a swamp). Sand lords are intelligent enough to know destroying water in a forest isn't enough to make it a desert permanently, and thus often work to build dams, redirect rivers and destroy lakes to ensure their work isn't undone. Because of their vulnerability to the cold sand lords rarely attempt to dry out colder climes, but an old sand lord with considerable support might make the attempt.

Because sand lords cannot climb or jump, terrain often limits their ability to spread. Some small deserts in mountainous regions are the home of sand lords trapped by cliffs and walls of rock, unable to get to a new region to spread their anti-water jihad. A sand lord in such a circumstance will negotiate earnestly to buy transport to a new, lusher region, but may later turn on allies if it sees an advantage in doing so.

Typical Physical Characteristics: A sand lord stands about 10 feet tall and weighs about 900 pounds. Its obviously plant-like body appears to be a large cactus, topped with broad and sharp leaves. It has a ring of ears just below its canopy of leaves, and moves about on a dozen root-like legs. It sees through its leaves, but in general depends more on its ability to sense vibrations through rock, earth and sand. It has no arms or hands, but can bend its entire trunk to wrap its large leaves around things, giving it approximately the same manual dexterity as a man with a thick glove on. Sand lords are genderless, but older examples begin to have dark, flaking patches and fewer leaves (a sure sign it's close to splitting into two new sand lords).

Society

The sand lord is an intelligent, vilely evil, mobile plant that hates anything green or vibrant. A sand lord lives to turn lush, wooded or jungle lands into dry, sandy deserts. As they are born full grown, exist only to destroy, and need not mate to continue their species, sand lords have very little in the way of culture. When sand lords do work together, it is almost always to overcome some barrier of terrain or body of water beyond the power of a single sand lord. Among their own kind they respect power and heritage, generally resulting in the eldest sand lords from different lineages forming a council to rule over the lesser kindred. As sand lords hate to be subservient, and one sand lord is a poor cohort to another due to their shared weaknesses, such arrangements rarely last long.

Alignment: Because sand lords come into existence with most of the memories and attitudes of their "parents," they share their predecessor's alignment. As nearly all sand lords are neutral evil, the spawn they create retain that alignment.

Sand lord Knowledge

The following table shows the results of Knowledge (nature) checks as it relates to the sand lord.

Knowledge (Nature)

DC	Result
20	Sand lords are evil water-hating plants of great intelligence.
25	A sand lord is vulnerable to cold and awkward in its movements.
30	Sand lords do anything in their power to destroy vegetation (other than other sand lords).

Typical Treasure

Sand lords have treasure suitable to a CR 9 creature, approximately 4,500 gp. If it is availble, sand lords buy protection from cold with their treasure, and are often found with a ring or amulet bolted directly to their bodies. Beyond that they rarely carry anything with them, instead building a cache of valuables taken from their victims and using it to buy or bribe allies as needed. These are most often durable items, such as gems and local trade goods such as spices.

Sand lords with Class Levels

Sand lords most often become evil druids, using their powers to bend and twist nature to better suit their desires. A few choose to become clerics to gods of destruction and fire or giant gods. They are most likely to choose from the Destruction, Evil, and Fire domains.

Level Adjustment: +6.

The Omniscient Eye

What Do You Eat When You're Subterranean?

In some fantasy fiction, underground humanoid species, such as Dwarves or Deep Elves, cultivate fungi or plants deep underground, without the use of sunlight. I believe I've read that ants (or is it termites?) cultivate fungi underground, but they feed these fungi with leaves harvested above ground, thus sunlight and photosynthesis is involved. Assuming there is plenty of water available, from underground streams, can something be done without the aid of the sun? Some sort of chemosynthesis? Or is there a third option, besides photosynthesis and chemosynthesis?
            --Peter Knutsen

Underground races add spice to many fantasy worlds, but keeping them from starving requires a few more ingredients. All life forms need a source of energy to fuel their ongoing (and ultimately losing) battle with entropy. There are two basic strategies for obtaining energy on Earth. Some organisms, called autotrophs or "self-is-food," can capture energy from non-living sources in their environment. The others, called heterotrophs or "other-is- food," eat organic materials (such as autotrophs, heterotrophs, decaying bodies, or waste products) that contain energy originally captured by autotrophs. An underground race can eat autotrophs or heterotrophs or be autotrophs and capture their own energy.

On Earth, all energy-capture strategies (two autotrophic methods plus heterotrophism) were developed by various bacteria. Photosynthesis, the ultimate basis for nearly all life on the planet, captures the energy of sunlight. Chemosynthesis, the only known autotrophic exception to photosynthesis, captures the energy released when inorganic substances are oxidized. Heterotrophs are fueled by oxidizing organic compounds created by other living things. Rather than come up with something new, the ancestors of multi-celled life shanghaied one or more types of bacteria and converted them into little "engines" for their cells. Plants have chloroplasts (descended from photosynthesizing bacteria) and mitochondria (descended from heterotrophic bacteria). Fungi and animals have only mitochondria. It may seem odd that plants have mitochondria, but they need to live even when the sun is not shining. They store sunlight energy in organic compounds and use their mitochondria to tap it later.

Underground autotrophs have to use a means of energy capture other than photosynthesis, because sunlight is rare in deep caverns. The only known autotrophs that do not photosynthesize are chemosynthetic bacteria. They oxidize such inorganic substances as elemental sulfur, thiosulfate, hydrogen sulfide, ammonia, nitrite, ferrous ions, or hydrogen gas, depending on the species. Most require oxygen, though not necessarily in high concentrations. Some types live in aerated soil and play key roles in the planetary sulfur and nitrogen cycles. Some grow in hot springs, such as those in Yellowstone Park. Other types live on the ocean bottom near sources of hydrogen sulfide and methane. These include hydrothermal vents (underwater volcanoes), whale carcasses, and cold-seeps. In cold- seeps, sulfate and methane from groundwater or sediments are converted to hydrogen sulfide by specialized bacteria.

Humans eat bacteria in vinegar, yogurt, and cheese, but cultivating a foodstuff composed exclusively of microscopic organisms might be challenging. The bacteria humans eat are in an organic medium, such as milk, which is itself a nutritious source of digestible energy. Chemosynthetic bacteria, on the other hand, have mediums such as soil or sulfur water. Luckily, there is nothing to prevent the GM from stepping in and inventing a multi-celled autotroph with chemosynthetic "chloroplasts." This would be an entirely new kingdom, and the GM would have enormous latitude in creating its characteristics. It could easily be as different from plants as the two heterotrophic kingdoms, animals and fungi, are from each other. It could grow in underground hot springs like seaweed or prowl caverns in search of the right sediments. The new kingdom might have a single species or thousands, might be common or extremely rare. It could be a refugee from an ancient time, dependent on the race it sustained. A real-life example of a species carried over from an earlier age by human intervention is the ginkgo, a beautiful and once- common tree that probably began to die out when dinosaurs stopped spreading its seeds. It may owe its existence today to being cultivated for centuries

in Chinese monasteries and palace gardens.

Of course, the GM need not be limited to the energy-capture mechanisms found on Earth. Other energy sources could theoretically support autotrophic life. The GM could invent bacteria that utilized these sources . . . or even go so far as inventing multi-celled organisms that, at the dawn of time, had press-ganged the fantasy bacteria into providing them energy-capture services.

Hot objects emit photons (mostly in the infrared), and these could be captured and utilized in a manner very similar to photosynthesis. For example, an organism could capture energy from the heat radiated by a magma pool. Of course, magma chambers are not known for being particularly safe or stable habitats. Underwater, life can only capture heat energy indirectly, because the radiated photons are quickly absorbed by the water. However, heat can add energy to chemical reactions and make them potential sources of chemosynthetic energy. For example, at hydrothermal vents, magma superheats seawater, which causes the water to react with dissolved sulfate. The heat energy is stored in the chemical bonds of hydrogen sulfide. Chemosynthetic bacteria break these bonds and capture the stored energy. The bacteria release sulfate as a waste product, and the sulfur cycle closes. This situation could also exist in caverns, in an underground stream bathing a magma pocket, for instance. This type of heat energy capture is not feasible on land because everything is roughly at equilibrium and lacks the necessary steep temperature gradients.

Radioactive elements are present underground, and a fantasy bacterium might harvest radioactive energy. Tending radiosynthetic species, happily growing on uranium deposits, could be a challenge for the farmers. The invented species would have to be less sensitive to radioactive damage than Earth species are. This is not as unreasonable as it seems. Oxygen is very reactive and was probably highly toxic to the original life on Earth (when oxygen was rare), but modern life is quite oxygen tolerant.

Many fantasy worlds have an additional source of energy: raw magic. A very clear idea of what mana is and how it behaves would be helpful when inventing a manasynthetic species. Is mana restricted to mages or does it exist in the environment? If only mages can produce mana, then a manasynthetic species would probably be created and sustained by them, like an animated skeleton. However, if mages have inhabited the world for a billion years, life forms could have evolved to capture energy from them. Also, being created by mages does not preclude a certain amount of autonomy if the spell is self- sustaining. For example, a mage may have created autotrophs with a self-propagating create-food spell. Modern mages would have to know the spells necessary to supply the autotrophs with energy, but would not necessarily know how to create more of them.

If mana is a natural energy, akin to radiation, free-living manasynthetic species could have evolved independently. Then the question is whether a mana source always radiates the same amount of energy. Plants, especially plants grown under low light, can be severely damaged when suddenly exposed to high photon flux densities. Therefore, sudden pulses of mana or large magical discharges could have disastrous consequences for underground manasynthetic farms.

If the members of the underground race do not eat autotrophs (and are not autotrophs themselves), they will have to live on heterotrophs. Heterotrophs require access to organic material, created ultimately by autotrophs. If those autotrophs are photosynthetic, the organic material will have to be transported underground after it is created. One way to move organic material is for the race to carry it. The [gardening ants](#) are a real-life example of an underground race that eats fungus raised on plant material that they bring down from the surface.

The underground race will probably have a source of water in their caverns. If the water flows from the surface, it could carry a load of organic materials: leaf detritus, insects, microorganisms, partially decayed animals. These could be consumed by heterotrophic bacteria, fungi, non-green plants, insects, or even fish. In a similar manner, most of the primary energy for many stream ecosystems is supplied by the land plants that grow along their banks. Fungi could theoretically bring organic material underground for themselves. A mushroom is the relatively small reproductive structure of a large fungus that snakes in nearly invisible threads throughout the soil. So if it is possible to reach the soil layer from the cavern, it is reasonable to imagine a fungus that "fruits" underground. Truffles actually do, but in the soil, not in caves.

Of course, a cave is not a good place for a mushroom. Above-ground, wind can spread its spores, and gravity will

deposit them on the rich, top layer of soil. Young fungi can begin life in a smorgasbord of partially decayed organic matter. This would not be the case underground. Left to its own devices, this fungus mutant would probably die out quickly. However, a mutant that could not survive naturally will do fine with outside help. For example, the bananas in the grocery store are the seedless fruit of a sterile plant -- evolutionarily a dead end, but faithfully cultivated by banana-eating humans. If the underground race could find a single mutant with subterranean mushrooms, they could then help it to survive. They might have to gather the spores and stick them to the roof of a cavern to get them nearer the surface. Perhaps they would have to fertilize the newly sprouted spores (with the bodies of dead dwarves?) so the young fungi could survive until they reached the organic material in the upper soil layers. The race would want to control most of the caverns in the vicinity, since the fungus would probably send out mushrooms wherever it pleased.

One problem with fungi is [digestibility](). Fungi are a good source of some vitamins, minerals, and proteins, but they contain very little fat, sugar, or calories -- that is, digestible energy. That might be encouraging to dieters, but it makes them a poor choice for a race's primary energy source. Most of the carbohydrates in fungi are in the form of difficult-to-digest chitin cell walls. Plants have cell walls of equally indigestible cellulose. Most herbivores cultivate specialized, cellulose-digesting, heterotrophic bacteria in their stomachs to make it possible for them to eat plants. Tolkien probably did not envision ruminant dwarves, but it could be done.

On the other hand, the bacteria could be applied externally, the same way humans make yogurt. Since yogurt-making is beyond Stone Age technology, such a race would have been reasonably advanced before they stopped foraging on the surface and began to live exclusively underground. (Yogurt is made by heating the medium to destroy dangerous -- or just yucky -- bacteria from the environment, adding a little yogurt bacteria culture, stirring, and keeping it gently warm until the bacteria multiply and partially break down the medium.) Death or loss of the starter culture would be fatal for such a race. Analogously, queen gardening ants carry starter fungus on their nuptial flights, and if the starter is lost or dies, the new colony is doomed.

Gardening ants solved the problem of obtaining digestible energy from fungi by "selectively breeding" domestic fungi with traits that wild fungi do not have. Some domestic fungi secrete specialized enzymes onto the leaf-fragment beds the ants prepare for them. The enzymes break down the leaves and cause sugars to form on them. These sugars are then licked up by worker ants. The fungi also produce tiny, nutrient-rich "fruit." Fungus domestication is obviously possible. However, unless one is playing *Ants and Burrows,* it might be difficult to sustain an RPG race on the swollen tips of mold hairs and sugar licked off a fungus.

Decaying material in soil is not the only source of organic compounds found underground. Methane is often found in fossil fuel deposits, and bacteria that oxidize methane are an important energy source for communities such as those on cold-seeps. Certain heterotrophic bacteria are able to use petroleum as an energy source. However, fossil fuels are often loaded with heavy metals. The bacteria (and presumably invented species using the same energy source) are able to deal with this, but that does not necessarily make them edible. Many surface plants that are heavy metal tolerant take the metals up and concentrate them in their tissues. An underground race with such a food source would have to have a means of dealing with high levels of heavy metals, either externally (through food preparation technology) or internally (by being tolerant themselves).

Transport ceases to be a problem if the autotrophic source of organic materials is already underground. A GM could have the race farm heterotrophs that eat one of the chemosynthetic, radiosynthetic, or manasynthetic autotrophs already discussed.

An unusual source of organic material for a radically designed fantasy world is true spontaneous generation. It is believed that the first life on Earth was heterotrophic and lived on spontaneously generated organic material. Laboratory experiments have successfully replicated such spontaneous generation, but only under conditions that bear little similarity to modern-day Earth. Early Earth probably had warm, shallow oceans, active volcanoes, and radioactive rocks under an atmosphere of water vapor, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, methane, and ammonia. The atmosphere was alive with energy, rent by lightning and bombarded with ultraviolet radiation. Molecular oxygen was essentially absent, and an oxygen-rich atmosphere seems to make the spontaneous generation of organic material impossible. Since lightning and ultraviolet radiation are not too common underground, the GM will have to use an alternative energy source such as radioactivity, volcanism, or magical discharges. Such conditions might

even be possible on an Earth-like world in completely sealed caverns. For a race from such caverns, the surface would have a hostile, poisonous atmosphere. Traveling there would be like visiting another planet. The race would probably require a life-support suit (or a protection-from-oxygen spell) and not be able to digest surface food. Another difficulty with spontaneously generated organic matter is that it does not accumulate quickly. It probably inspired the early evolution of all existing energy-capture methods by becoming scarce.

In some organisms that the underground race might eat, the line between heterotrophs and autotrophs blurs. This happens when a heterotroph and an autotroph form a partnership and live entwined with each other. The heterotroph usually provides defense and raw materials from the environment; the autotroph captures energy for them both. The heterotroph is usually much larger and accounts for the appearance of the combo-organism. On land, heterotrophic fungi and autotrophic bacteria or algae form partnerships known as lichens. In cold-seeps and hydrothermal vents, several types of animals, including shrimp, worms, mussels, and clams, have formed partnerships with chemosynthetic bacteria. A GM wishing to create one of these life forms should realize that the major difference between them and true autotrophs is that the partnership was formed much more recently than the dawn of life on Earth. Therefore, both partners have close relatives that are not married (not all fungi are lichens). Sometimes the partners can be separated, if only in a laboratory, and grow independently. The autotrophs usually live within their partners' bodies, not within their cells. Lichens look much different than free-living fungi, because the fungus grows compactly instead of branching out in search of food. The autotroph partners in lichens are photosynthetic, but fantasy lichen could have chemosynthetic, radiosynthetic, or manasynthetic bacteria. Several lichens have been traditionally eaten by humans, including the arctic reindeer moss and desert manna lichen. Since the energy source is the autotrophic partner, lichens may be a better source of digestible energy than are fungi.

Certain shrimp farm chemosynthetic bacteria on their exoskeletons and feed their farms by swimming to "fields" of dissolved sulfur compounds. The shrimp then graze bacteria off their own bodies. Tube worms supply their bacteria with inorganic carbon, oxygen, hydrogen sulfide, and nitrate that they absorb from the surrounding water. The substances are transported in the worm's blood to the internal organ where it keeps its bacteria. The worms then excrete the bacteria's waste products: sulfate and protons. The worms may live to be 250 years old in the stable environment of cold seeps. Adult tube worms have no mouths or digestive systems since, like plants, they have an internal energy source. It is believed that the larvae are born with mouths and eat their bacteria when they begin life.

One type of mussel contains two kinds of bacteria: some that oxidize methane and some that oxidize sulfur compounds. Presumably, this allows it to change gears if one source of energy is depleted. Clams partnering with chemosynthetic bacteria harbor these bacteria within the cells of their gills. The bacteria are passed on to the next clam generation in the eggs. The partnership is so tight that attempts to culture the bacteria independently in the laboratory have failed. These clams are probably the closest thing on Earth to a chemosynthetic plant.

An adventurous GM might want to have an underground race whose members are combo-organisms and have their own internal engines cranking out energy. This does not mean that the race can just sit back and forget about food, however. They will have to supply their internal autotrophs with all the minerals, fluids, and gases they require as raw materials.

Some GMs will prefer designing a single food-species for their underground race, since it involves less work (and fewer opportunities for over-zealous players to ask sticky questions). However, many of the problems discussed above cease to be an issue if the underground race is part of a diverse ecosystem. Mushrooms or lichens do not have to be perfectly digestible if, as is the case for humans, they make up only part of the diet. Having sufficient hot-spring surface area to cultivate paper-thin bacterial mats is not so critical when they are a delicacy and not the race's sole source of energy. There are a few real world examples of ecosystems based entirely upon chemosynthetic bacteria.

The most famous chemosynthesis-based ecosystems are at deep-sea [hydrothermal vents]. Chemosynthetic bacteria oxidizing sulfur compounds support a host of heterotrophs such as fish, shrimp, snails, crabs, clams, mussels, barnacles, sponges, and octopuses. Tube worms can grow to more than a meter long, easily large enough to sustain an underground RPG race. This type of ecosystem is not restricted to the deep, lightless regions of the ocean, but it is much more striking in places devoid of photosynthesis-based life.

An example of a chemosynthesis-based cavern ecosystem is in Movile Cave in Romania. It consists of limestone caves partially submerged in hot springs that are rich in hydrogen sulfide, ammonium ions, and methane. Prior to discovery, the caves were sealed off from the world above. They have a specific atmosphere enriched in methane with up to ten times more carbon dioxide and one third less oxygen than the outside air. Microbial mats made up of bacteria and fungi float on the water surface, adhere to cave walls and sit on submerged cavern floors. Bacterial species include some that oxidize methane and some that oxidize sulfur compounds. The deep waters of the cave have no oxygen, so the submerged mats may consist entirely of heterotrophs that feed on methane or material falling from above. The microbial mats feed terrestrial and aquatic animals such as snails, worms, pillbugs, millipedes, springtails, and bristletails. Carnivores include blind predatory leeches, water scorpions, pseudoscorpions, centipedes, and spiders. The chemical differences between photosynthesis and chemosynthesis likely mean that, in a closed system like Movile Cave, the development of an unusual atmosphere is inevitable. However, a chemosynthetic ecosystem can probably form even if the cavern's atmosphere is not isolated from the surface. (The Movile Cave system has apparently survived being exposed to the surface by the shaft its discoverers constructed.)

Designing an ecosystem requires extra effort, but it will make the underground race more sustainable and less susceptible to famine disasters. The first building block of an ecosystem is an energy source. The GM can use one or several of the energy sources discussed here. Each energy source needs at least one autotrophic species to capture it. Bacteria are the most likely autotrophs, but they can be supplemented by some multi-celled species. Heterotrophic microbes and insects could graze on the bacteria and provide food for larger predators. Decomposers (usually bacteria and fungi) must be present to prevent the ecosystem from collapsing with all its raw materials tied up in dead bodies and waste products. Each ecosystem component is a potential source of food. For instance, the underground race might sweeten their lichen tea with ants full of leaf-mold sugars, roast the moles that live on bacteria-grazing insects, spicing them with microbial mat (for that sulfur tang), and make salads of subterranean mushrooms and chemosynthetic seafood, sprinkled with manasynthetic lice the mage combs out of his beard.

Even lichen-like organisms might benefit from a varied diet. Hunting down outside sources of energy is probably not effective for something with an internal energy source, but the race might eat to gain nutrients. Carnivorous plants, for example, cannot obtain sufficient nitrogen from the soils they prefer, so they photosynthesize for their energy and eat insects as a nitrogen source. Feeding an underground race requires, first and foremost, a source of energy. The GM will have to decide what this energy source is and how the race acquires it. This includes deciding if they are using the energy source directly (autotrophic), eating something that can utilize the energy source (eating autotrophs), eating something that is getting its energy from other living organisms (eating heterotrophs), or cultivating an autotroph inside their bodies (acting like a lichen). Some energy sources can be present underground naturally (precursors to chemosynthesis, heat, radioactivity, mana). Others, like sunlight, have to be transported there. Organic compounds produced using sunlight can be transported by the race or by water, transported by the food source (hypothetical underground mushrooms), or buried (coal and oil). Although it is possible to design a race with a single food source, creating an ecosystem with a combination of energy sources and food types provides more variety and may ultimately make for a more interesting game.

For the Sake of Appearances

"Plants" based on chemosynthetic bacteria would probably not be green, since the green color comes from pigments used in photosynthesis. Some bacteria that oxidize hydrogen sulfide have particles of inorganic sulfur in their cells, for instance. Images from Movile Cave can be found in the documentary *Ends of the Earth: The Secret Abyss of the Movile Cave*. The following websites also have images of chemosynthetic life on Earth.

Bacteria That Oxidize Sulfur Compounds

- Thiothrix -- http://www.lpi.usra.edu/education/EPO/yellowstone2002/workshop/tbvspring1/
- Sulfolobus -- http://web.umr.edu/~microbio/BIO221_1999/S_sulfataricus.html
- Sulfolobus -- http://biology.kenyon.edu/Microbial_Biorealm/archaea/sulfolobus/sulfolobus.html

Bacteria That Oxidize Nitrogen Compounds

- Nitrosomonas -- http://biology.kenyon.edu/Microbial_Biorealm/bacteria/nitrosomonas/nitrosomonas.html
- Nitrosospira -- http://genome.jgi-psf.org/finished_microbes/nitmu/nitmu.home.html

Bacteria That Oxidize Iron Compounds

- Thiobacillus ferrooxidans -- http://bugscope.beckman.uiuc.edu/members/2004-038/data/presets/preset-3-640x480.jpg

Bacteria That Oxidize Hydrogen Gas

- Xanthobacter -- http://141.150.157.117:8080/prokPUB/chaphtm/119/COMPLETE.htm

Animals with Chemosynthetic Bacterial Partners

- Tube worms, Riftia -- http://www.marinetech.org/nine_degrees/graphics/photos/expedition/nov19/tube_worm.jpg
- Tube worms, Riftia -- http://pubs.usgs.gov/gip/dynamic/tube_worms.html
- Clams, Calyptogena -- http://walrus.wr.usgs.gov/hydrocarbons/clams.html
- Mussels, Bathymodiolus -- http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/explorations/deepeast01/logs/sep25/media/bigmussel.html
- Shrimp, Rimicaris exoculata -- http://www.geocities.com/magnus_johnson/research/rimi.htm

Cave Microbial Mats

- http://www.geo.utexas.edu/chemhydro/LowerKane/microhabitats.htm

Cold Seeps and Hydrothermal Vents

- http://www.mbari.org/news/homepage/2005/noseeps.html#aboutcbcs
- http://www.ifremer.fr/exocetd/gb/gallery/galleryeco.htm
- http://www.noc.soton.ac.uk/ventox/files/focuson/atos/atos.html

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- Taiz, Lincoln and Eduardo Zeiger. 1991. *Plant Physiology.* The Benjamin/Cummings Publishing Company, Inc. Redwood City, California.

--Sierra Dawn Stoneberg Holt

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

Dungeon Crawl Classics #31: The Transmuter's Last Touch (for *d20 System*)

Published by [Goodman Games](#)

Written by Jeff LaSala

Art, Maps, & Graphics by Jason Edwards, Cliff Kurowski, Brad McDevitt, Stefan Poag, Jeremy Simmons, & Joseph Goodman

Edited by Joseph Goodman & Liz Rich

16-page b&w saddlesticked softcover; $2.00

Let's see what a two-dollar game adventure looks like.

First of all, ***Dungeon Crawl Classics #31: The Transmuter's Last Touch*** may be the first game in history to have a title that a) is longer than the adventure it contains, and b) fills up the word count before the review is finished. Goodman Games wants your gaming dollars -- both of them -- and it's going the dirt-cheap route to get you to part with them.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

Another in their series of adventures designed to recall the good old days of dungeon-delving, this crawl is designed to challenge four to six characters of 1st and 2nd level. The heroes hear tales of a series of raids on caravans or other passersby through the local countryside (or whatever else the DM dreams up -- you're kind of on your own on getting involved with the story, not that it's at all hard to work it in). Tracking those responsible leads the party to a secret entrance in the side of a mountain. In these catacombs hides a small tribe of kobolds (about the only rung downward from orcs), but the surprise comes when these dog soldiers turn out to be a bigger bite to chew than our "been-there done-that" brand of champions expected. They all seem to possess strange enhancements that make them more fearsome foes in a fight than their barely-worth-the-XP brethren.

These tunnels were once the lair of a wizard obsessed with transmutation magic. His experiments were so successful and so extensive, they left behind small pockets of augmenting eldritch energy that remained long after he'd found new digs. An amplified kobold chieftain (well, he's a chieftain now that he's killed the old one) called Tazex dragged his new clan here and seeks to master the magic more fully to boost his tribal power base. Anyone passing over one of the loci in the hideout will find themselves temporarily imbued with earth magic, or the ability to breathe fire or spew venom, or one of a number of other effects. Anyone confronting a kobold who's done the same will get beaten up by a freakish kobold.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The artwork carries on a proud tradition -- it's stuff that looks like Erol Otis (or someone like him) drew it 30 years ago, with lots of detail crammed into the individual sections of a framework that's simple overall. Another familiar sight to buyers of the Dungeon Crawl Classics series: It has artwork that serves as handouts. Three nicely done pieces at the back can give players a clear picture of what the scene looks like, though only one of these is of intrinsic value

to the group (it gives visual clues to a puzzle's solution). The map is clear and everything seems immediately recognizable, even at a glance, so you won't be flipping the pages.

The whole volume only comes in at 16 pages, so there's not much flipping to be done regardless. It may be brief, but it's all professional writing, very polished and pleasant to read with the medieval feel one wants in one's fantasy game modules. With illustrations and the Open Game License, it's actually more like 12 pages, but the consumer is getting exactly what was promised. It's the sort of adventure that, if it takes you more than one session to finish, it's only because you're having too much fun with it. If it takes less than one night, or it stinks, there's the beauty of the enterprise…you only paid two bucks for it, so zip it, crybaby.

The Transmuter's Last Touch is kind of a one-trick pony, but the gimmick only needs to sustain a single evening's play (and for a team of first-levels at that). It plays fast and loose without doing the **d20 System** rules any injustice -- it would be nice to see more adventures loosen up in like fashion -- and, while pretty linear, it has enough little details to make it more lively than a checklist of encounters. Oh, and the book contains a checklist of the encounters -- handy. The danger level can be scaled up a little to accommodate slightly tougher good guys. The "Further Adventures" section at the back is only a couple of uninspired paragraphs (no mention of the location's value to the heroes as a base of operations), but just like the beginning, you can figure out for yourself where to go from here. Goodman's job -- delivering the goods -- is done. Just don't let them know, or they'll jack up the price.

--Andy Vetromile

Eve of Destruction, Gamer Style

(As an aside, I wrote this column before reading this week's Omniscient Eye installment. I mention this because a throwaway line in that piece is my thesis statement. Clearly the Omniscient Eye knows all and displays that knowledge in curious ways.)

This has been at least the second time where something significant has happened in the news while I was out of town at a convention. The first time was the tragic destruction of the Shuttle *Columbia* a few years ago when I was a guest at Dreamation.

Now, several days after having written my column last week (but before it posted), I discover that the airlines went bug-nuts about nine hours after I got off my last plane, after British authorities stopped a James-Bond-esque plot involving sports drinks and battery-operated gadgets. Being out of the loop when a major event happens is particularly distressing to me because, as something of an Internet addict, the only time I'm really *not* attuned to the goings-on in the world is when I go away to a convention, and it's thus one of the very few times where I can be in a "have you heard-?" moment about an event that happened a dozen or more hours earlier.

Fortunately, the niggling voice in the back of my mind suggested that -- even though my plan entailed taking carry-on luggage only -- I may want to make sure that carry-on suitcase could also survive being a checked item. This is good, because otherwise I'd have no hope of smuggling home the planned countless bottles of shampoo and conditioner from my hotel stay. (Apparently Orlando -- the home of the Yo-Yo Contest I just attended -- is particularly sensitive about the recently thwarted plot, since I guess Orlando International Airport is a popular spot for airlines from the U.K. to fly into. As a result the local newscasts there had been speaking with a crazed glint in cadences normally reserved for folks who stand on street corners and report about how the End is Nigh.)

Anyway, my usual column this week is going to be a commentary tangentially sparked by the events of this past week.

I speak without exaggeration when I note that the entire world is at war . . . and few even realize this war wages every nanosecond of every day. It is a war that crosses all class, race, religious, gender, and species lines, and it is a war that all experts believe, ultimately, we cannot win.

We are at war with entropy.

As entities that live, we -- by definition -- combat against the forces that seek to tear the universe apart. "Things fall apart," writes Yeats, "the center cannot hold." The fundamental building blocks of the universe favor decay and change toward dust; life attempts to act contrary to the forces of cataclysm by providing stability and order, growing and evolving against all odds to continue the cycle. Consider that, as best we can tell, the only way the lifeless moon will look any different in 100,000 years (barring the intervention of life) is by the intervention of forces that will erode or destroy that which is there.

At its core, any stability provided by life is cosmically fleeting, and is -- in some ways -- a lie. The universe has another dirty secret, which influences almost every aspect of our lives: Destruction is *much* easier than creation. (It's a poorly kept secret, but one that many people don't realize or talk about.) That which we have is much easier to tear down than it is to create anew. A determined soldier could easily kill dozens of people in a matter of seconds; it would take about half a *billion* seconds to conceive, birth, nurture, and raise a couple dozen people.

I couldn't help but think of this fact again when reading about coverage of the thwarted plot. Materials that probably cost less than $100 could be used to destroy a plane that costs $100 million (not to mention the collateral damage and the toll of human lives). And, of course, recent history points to countless examples where it has taken very few resources to cause vast amounts of destruction.

Now, in the mind of a nihilist, this is reason to curl up into a whimpering ball and wait for death's sweet embrace. But that's not what this column is about; for one thing, this magazine is all about good gaming, and ***Ball: The Whimpering***

isn't on White Wolf's release schedule through the end of this year.

While not as significant as the loss of life or property that has made recent news, the ease of destruction compared to the difficulty of creation is one that factors into many aspects of the gaming world. I've been in LARPs where 50 people could have had a good time, were it not for one individual determined to ensure we did not. I've had campaigns fall apart because of one mistake. I've seen game companies collapse because one product caused its most popular line to "jump the shark."

But, as I said before, this column isn't about despair. This column proposes that, as living entities, we owe it to our very existence to stave off entropy as earnestly and fruitfully as we can. I would urge everyone to consider acting against the forces of negativity and chaos whenever possible. Let's say a new person on a favorite gaming message board posts a dumb question; sure, it would be easy to tear that person down, but what does that accomplish in the long run? Rather, answering that question may well turn that person into a fan, fostering another root necessary for a healthy, growing game line.

Or let's say your Friendly Local Game Shop is struggling, and it's a store you happen to like. The easiest thing to do would be nothing or to take your business elsewhere. Could you instead act against entropy in this case, perhaps by running game demos once every other week or so? Would that help? Who knows? But it might be worth a chat with the game shop's owner to find out. (And, yes, I know I'm getting dangerously close to a *Brady Bunch*-esque "Let's have a talent show and save the orphanage!" plot point. Optimism often wears bell-bottoms.)

Or, as a final example, maybe the current campaign you're in is enjoyable enough, but the gaming group has taken a turn for the worse in the past few sessions. Again, it would be easy to be destructive -- chatting during the game, bringing a good book to read -- but the real challenge lies in being productive. Can you pinpoint why the games aren't going well? Have you talked it over with the GM? Many moons ago I wrote about how my group came to me and said, "We need to talk." I still get a sinking in my stomach when I'm reminded at how I could have crafted such a supremely un-fun session for them, but I'm still grateful that they came to me rather than choosing a less-constructive alternative.

Of course, destruction is a necessary part of life. Brush needs to be cleared away, decay leads to future nutrients, old growth needs to end to make room for new life. I'm not suggesting that all battles against entropy need to be waged tooth-and-claw, or even need to be fought at all. But -- though the urge to tear down dwells deep within many of us -- the ability of humanity as a collective to fight against those urges is also strong. And in the game of life, keeping entropy in check for as long as possible is a more noble goal than most others.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

RuneQuest

Published by [Mongoose Publishing](#)

Written by Matthew Sprange

Cover by Bob Cram & Dan Howard

Illustrated by Eric Bergeron, Scott Clark, Alexandre Draude, Juan Manual Espinosa, Ryan Horvath, Danilo Moretti, Tony Parker, Phil Renne, & Chad Sergesketter.

130-page b&w hardcover; $24.95

These days, it seems that nothing remains out of print for very long. The trend of returning to gaming classics begun in 2005 continues in 2006 with the re-publication of *RuneQuest* and not by anyone you would expect. First published in 1978, *RuneQuest* offered integrated skills and combat mechanics employing the Basic RolePlay system that would go on to power so many of Chaosium's future titles. It also offered an integral setting in Glorantha, a highly detailed Bronze Age world in which anyone could learn any skill or spell, there being no set professions or classes. Only with the publication of *RuneQuest III* in 1987 by Avalon Hill did the game move away from Glorantha and offer something more generic.

This new *RuneQuest -- Rune Quest IV?* -- published by the UK's largest RPG company, Mongoose Publishing, sits somewhere in between being a generic fantasy RPG and being written with Glorantha in mind. The default, assumed setting *is* Glorantha, hence the lack of creatures such as Goblins and Orcs, and the inclusion of Gloranthan stalwarts such as the Broo, Trollkin, and the poor old unhappy Ducks. The objective of the game is obtaining runes, symbols carved into stone or wood and imbued with magical powers; going on lengthy, mighty quests; and on enrolling in cults. The latter can be religious, scholarly, magical and so on, with most proving a source of support, training, knowledge and even magic to their members.

Everything else in these new core rules could be used in almost any other fantasy settings. The basic mechanics, the character backgrounds and professions are all easily transported, even the example cults, since they are not Gloranthan. Mongoose has fully supported the generic aspect by giving this *RuneQuest* an Open Gaming Licence which means that, just like the *d20 System,* any publisher can use the rules for its setting. Already Mongoose is planning to use them for Fritz Leiber's Lankhmar as well as Glorantha, and Other World Creations will be releasing scenarios for its Diomin setting using these rules.

For a Mongoose book, this core *RuneQuest* book is a surprisingly neat and tidy affair. It is all light grey with an unobtrusive border and reasonable artwork. The writing is clear and virtually free of errors, plus it comes with plenty of easy-to-find examples. Overall this is a nicely put together book that feels unrushed and professional, not always a case with other Mongoose releases.

As a Basic RolePlay powered RPG *RuneQuest* still uses percentile dice for all skill, combat, and magic checks. Roll low and you succeed. Combat is still dangerous, with every blow counting and every character in danger of losing a limb. Armor and the ability to parry or block are all vital to survival. A character possesses as many opportunities to react to attacks upon him in a round as he has to make attacks. Such attempts to dodge or parry are termed reactions

and are really the only slightly more complex aspect of combat. When a parry or dodge attempt is made, both the attacker and defender roll again. In either case, the attacker rolls his weapon skill again, whilst the defender rolls his dodge skill, or his weapon or shield skill if a parry. These results are compared to see whether the attack succeeds, or the parry stops some or all of the damage.

Possession and integration of a rune is necessary to cast magic in this core version of **RuneQuest.** Other forms of magic will be addressed in future supplements, in particular the **RuneQuest Companion**. Having integrated a rune, at the cost of a point of POW, the character is now rune touched. He not only gains the Rune Casting skill for that rune, he can also learn spells associated with it, and is granted a runic power. For example the Fire rune lets the rune touched character learn spells like Fire Arrow, Fire Blade and Ignite, and grants him resistance to fire. Some spells are graded so it is possible to learn Bladesharp 1, as well as Bladesharp 3, the latter costing more to cast, but causing more damage. Finding runes can form the basis of quests and no rune touched will give up his runes willingly.

Character generation is an easy process, and tending towards competent beginning heroes. Attributes are rolled on 4d6, the lowest die result dropped, except for size and intelligence, rolled on 3d6+6, the lowest die also being discarded. The default race is human, and although the bestiary includes races that can be played, these core rules are not really geared towards it. Each character has a cultural background -- barbarian, peasant, townsfolk, or noble, plus a profession. Both background and profession grants the character bonuses to his basic skills, which everyone has, and advanced skills, particular to the character's background and profession. Finally every character has free points to assign. The process is both easy and familiar, and covers most character types possible. Not just soldiers, wizards, thieves and priests, but also farmers, merchants, scholars, shaman and woodsmen.

In addition, a character has hero points, expended to re-roll dice, turn a major injury suffered into a glancing blow, and even to alter the storyline of the GM's current plot in some small way. They can also be saved to gain legendary abilities like Battle Fury, Decapitating Swing, Linguist, and Wall Leaping. All have high requirements before they can be purchased. Other character objectives include improving skills through practice and training, and joining cults or guilds. The benefits for joining a cult include gaining access to skill and spell tutors for those taught by the cult. Becoming a lay member or initiate in a cult is relatively easy, a more long term goal being to rise to the status and skill of runepriest or runelord.

There is little in the way of background in this core book. It assumes a complex Bronze Age setting where slavery is not unknown, iron working is rare and prized, and the forces of Chaos, such as the Broo are a threat. This is the case in the scenario also released alongside this rule book, **Rune of Chaos**, which like this rule book is both generic and easily set in Glorantha.

Revisiting this new edition of **RuneQuest** feels like coming back to an old friend -- a leaner, cleaner, and more streamlined friend. This shows primarily in the combat and magic rules, which retain the feel of previous editions of **RuneQuest,** but are accessible and easier to both run and play. Although long-time devotees of Glorantha will see little of it here, the mechanics will be familiar, and they can at least look forward to the forthcoming **Glorantha: The Second Age** sourcebook. It is difficult to identify any real problem with this core book, but perhaps the price is a little too high, given the lack of background. For the old time fan this is a welcome return -- they know what to expect. For the newcomer, this **RuneQuest** offers mechanics that are a little old fashioned, but nevertheless detailed, logical, and playable.

--*Matthew Pook*

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

Pyramid Review

Explorer's Handbook (for Eberron)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by David Noonan, Frank Brunner, & Rich Burlew

Edited by Michelle Lyons, Scott Fitzgerald Gray, & Kim Mohan

Art & maps by Wayne Reynolds, Anne Stokes, Draxhall Jump Entertainment, Eric Deschamps, Francis Tsai, Howard Lyon, Igor-Alban Chevalier, Mark Tedin, Steve Prescott, & Dennis Kauth

160-page color hardcover; $29.95

Introduce your players to a new land, a new setting, or a new world, and the first thing the responsible company is going to do is start pumping out the gazetteers. When Wizards picked up the Eberron line, you knew there'd be a slew of what to see, where to go, who to kill supplements. We've seen a few, but for general interest, the ***Explorer's Handbook*** is a good reference.

Some of the guides, like ***Sharn: City of Towers,*** have been really good tours of important sites, but there's so much of the world to see that, at that rate, the buying public will never see the end of the tunnel. This book begins with one of the best introductions ever and ends with the treasures your journeys rightfully earn you. In between it takes a broad view, going wide and surprisingly deep . . . and you're halfway through the book before you get into specific hotspots. The first half discusses your travel and character options.

If you've ever wondered about the transportation systems that crisscross the world, the elemental vessels are laid bare. This includes, but isn't limited to, the ubiquitous lightning rail and airships. Look under the hood of these marvels to see what makes them tick (or what makes them come to a screeching halt in front of determined bandits), and that includes the elemental itself. Each device has one pulsating through the vehicle's infrastructure, communing with the captain and keeping it aloft (or afloat, or . . .). The lightning rail needs to make stops somewhere, so a standard station is included. The guilds are usually the only ones with the resources needed to operate a line, so trips are tempered by their influence and their desire to keep tabs on the inroads citizens are making to those areas lost during the Last War.

Since not everyone can afford an E-ticket ride, mundane options are considered. How do you hook up with a caravan? How do you make money from one? What's the best way to move your party? And why can't you simply teleport anywhere you want to go across Khorvaire? It seems like workaday stuff, but they make the individual considerations worthy of a Dungeon Master's time. Organizations like the Wayfinders offer to help explorers, and not only do you get their background, the book is dotted with their amusing, tongue-in-cheek how-not-to tips: how not to be remembered when traveling, how not to be sacrificed, how not to be enslaved. And if you need the assistance of a thunder guide or the services of an airship captain, why pay for prestige classes when you can play them?

Most of the remainder is specific locales: the start, middle, and endpoints. Need the traditional tavern from which to jumpstart the adventure? The Glitterdust Nightclub looks like it belongs more in a cyberpunk setting than here, but it has some interesting intrigues to get you on your way. Shae Mordai, the City of the Dead, is a sample stopover where you can load up on elven advice. But by far you get more destinations, and this is where the volume stakes its claim.

Shipwrecks, underground caverns full of valuable shards, the forested fortress of a mad elf, observatories and dungeons "manned" by dragons, and the remains of the cultures of the giants of Xendrik now populate your travelogue. Each one has a map, some inhabitants, and some hooks for your game. These sites open up some pretty ripe plots. Sure, you can pop in and out in an evening's play but, whether deliberate or a mere side-effect, reading these entries you get the feel that there's a lot going on in their setting. Limited in area, they offer several possibilities. The sorts of storylines you expect to see filling an entire series of modules get doled out freely, and they all sound like they would have a real effect on the fortunes of the surrounding continents. It shows insight into the schemes brewing just below the world's surface.

It looks like the same roster of names we've seen in other Wizards art galleries, but they've elevated their game here. Those random maps of which the company is so fond finally find a home, and the portraits beside everything are first rate. They're colorful candy for your mind's eye, but when you reach the book's exploration section you'll see what the design crew can really accomplish. Every frame makes the world of Eberron seem dark, mysterious, and irresistible.

Rather than hoard their secrets, this time Wizards has chosen to give players plenty of rope in the ***Explorer's Handbook.*** Although it's lacking in the crunch many want from a new book, and perhaps a bit too elementary for true veterans, it's refreshing to see an entry in the Eberron series stop playing coy with its readers and give them the sorts of riddles -- and answers -- they can sink their teeth into.

--Andy Vetromile

Kirby-2

Part I

by Steve Kenson

"It's a strange world . . . let's keep it that way."
— Warren Ellis, *Planetary*

You will believe a man can fly, because on the Earth Infinity knows as "Kirby-2," people *can* fly, and lift tanks, punch through brick walls, read minds, and melt steel with a glance, among other things. What exists only in comic books on Homeline is reality on Kirby-2, and has been for some time now. What Infinity is only beginning to discover is the existence of so-called "metahumans" isn't even Kirby's most interesting feature. It turns out metahumans may have existed there far longer than even people on Kirby-2 believe, and the very nature of the parallel may pose a grave threat to the Infinite Worlds.

Kirby-2, 2008

Divergence Point

1938; supers exist. Numerous reality quakes since then.

Major Civilizations

Western (multipolar), Chinese (empire), Japanese (unitary), Orthodox (multipolar).

Great Powers

United Nations (global technocracy, CR2), United States (representative democracy, CR3), People's Republic of China (dictatorship, CR5), Japan (representative democracy, CR4), Russian Republic (oligarchy, CR4).

Worldline Data

TL: 8 (plus variable superscience)

Mana Level: normal

Quantum: 5 **Infinity Class:** Z1 **Centrum Zone:** Red

Crisis History

Kirby's history is superficially the same as Homeline up until the late 1930s, when the first known metahumans appear. Of course, it's difficult to make any definitive statements about Kirby's history, because there is evidence the parallel's history has *changed* on occasion: at least three times Infinity knows of, and possibly at a number of other points in the past. The present-day on Kirby-2 was not "always" its present and the overall "direction" of its history has apparently shifted. It's difficult (indeed, meaningless) to say "when" these changes happened, only that they did happen, and there

is lingering evidence of them in different places in the present-day of the parallel.

Initially, Infinity researchers would have said Kirby's "revisions" were similar to the sorts of interventions Centrum and the Infinity Patrol staged on echo parallels, except Kirby-2 is not an echo (or at least not like any echo Infinity knows), and evidence suggests the revisions have been going on far longer than either Infinity or Centrum have had parachronic technology, meaning something else is at work here.

Quantum Fluctuations

A significant part of what makes Kirby-2 unique (apart from the existence of metahumans, of course) is the parallel's state of quantum flux. Infinity researchers have discovered Kirby-2 has a greater level of "quantum instability" than any other parallel they have encountered to date (including the various "echo parallels," which are quite unstable in their own right). This means Kirby-2 is far more prone to phenomena like reality quakes, banestorms, and the like. In fact, Infinity has discovered evidence that such things have happened many times in the parallel's history, perhaps accounting for some of its current state of being.

As the research division explained to the Infinity Council, reality in Kirby-2 is far more "plastic" than elsewhere. In essence, the impossible is possible there. Physical laws are more "suggestions" than hard and fast rules, and Kirby's inhabitants break them with alarming regularity. According to the researchers' theory, the parallel's quantum fluctuations account for a number of unusual conditions.

Kirby's Law

First, and foremost, Kirby-2 features an unusually high level of serendipity. Otherwise "random" events seem to conspire to bring about incredibly unlikely circumstances. What can only be called "dumb luck" runs rampant on Kirby-2, to the point where what would be a fatal accident on Homeline or elsewhere endows someone on Kirby-2 with superhuman powers! This effect cannot be accurately predicted, but researchers suggest a maxim they call "Kirby's Law" which says: "When the going gets tough, things get weird."

Among other things, this means the Luck and Serendipity advantages are incredibly common on Kirby-2. So much so, in fact, that GMs may wish to simply give *everyone* (or at least all player characters and major NPCs) a level in each for free! It also means the various cinematic options found in the ***Basic Set*** all are in full force on Kirby-2.

Powers and Abilities, Far Beyond Those of Ordinary Men . . .

Myth Parallel?

There is some debate as to whether or not Kirby-2 should be classified as a "myth parallel" based on one interesting fact: Many of the events and personalities of the parallel are detailed in a series of obscure comic books published on Homeline in the 1960s and 1970s. Infinity researcher (and avid comic book collector) Arvin Mayhew brought this to the attention of the Research Division, which has thoroughly examined the comics.

Published by the now defunct Pyramid Publishing, the books feature remarkable similarities to people and events from Kirby-2. Although the correlations are not exact, they are far too close to be mere coincidence. The involvement of legendary comics creator Jack Kirby with the books is what led Infinity researchers to name the parallel after him.

How is it people and events on another parallel appeared in a series of comic books on Homeline, some them from *before* they appeared on Kirby-2? Theories vary, but include the following:

- The comics' creator(s) were latent clairvoyants who somehow "tuned in" on actual events happening on Kirby-2 and recorded them in their stories, believing they actually made them up.
- A reality quake (see below) on Kirby-2 -- most likely the one in 1959 -- sent "ripples" through the quantum strata, which certain sensitive individuals on Homeline (and possibly other parallels) picked up as dreams or random imaginings.
- One or more of the individuals involved with Pyramid Publishing was actually *from* Kirby-2 and writing or drawing fictionalized accounts of real events. As yet there is no evidence of this, nor any motivation for publishing events from Kirby-2 as comic books on Homeline.
- Kirby-2 is an unusual "myth parallel," and the comic books on Homeline actually *created* it in some way, either bringing it

The second, and most obvious, effect of Kirby-2's quantum nature is the existence of metahuman powers, most of which violate known physical laws. When it comes to metahumans, things like the square-cube law, conservation of matter and energy, the speed of light, and other universal constants seem to go right out the window. Super-strong metahumans can pick up tanks (or buildings!) without sinking into the ground, or without the structures crumbling in their grip. They fly through the air at super-sonic speeds without devastating everything around them (or even causing sonic booms in many cases). They engage in battles that level entire city blocks, yet casualties are amazingly light, and no one questions the occasions when the damage seems to disappear overnight.

The currently most accepted theory for these phenomena involves the "observer effect," suggesting metahumans are unconsciously altering reality on a fundamental level, bending the laws of physics through some (possibly psionic) mechanism. In essence, metahumans can do all the amazing things they do because they (and other people on Kirby-2) *believe* they can. Infinity notes that on occasions when Kirby-2 metahumans have visited other parallels, their powers *usually* continue to function, suggesting the mechanism is at least partially inherent in the metahumans and not solely the nature of their home reality; however, it may be a combination of the two, since there are realities that apparently retard or negate metahuman powers. Needless to say, researchers are very curious to find out if Homeline is one of these. It is worth noting that Kirby-2 superscience doesn't work reliably on Homeline.

Retroactive Continuity

Finally, the unstable quantum nature of Kirby-2 makes the parallel extremely prone to various quantum-level disruptions of the space-time continuum. In particular, reality quakes apparently occur on Kirby-2 with greater frequency than Paralabs researchers even thought was possible. Current theory suggests there is a fairly major reality quake or "revision" on Kirby-2 about every twenty years or so; the last "big one" was the so-called Millennium Quake (or "Y2Quake" as some call it). The next is expected sometime around 2020 AD (local year).

A major reality quake can significantly alter the parallel's history (which changes the present accordingly). This is called "retroactive continuity" since changes in the present (the reality quake) cause alterations to the past, which in turn changes the present. The big reality quakes are accompanied by numerous pre- and after-shocks, minor changes or "adjustments" in Kirby's history, a kind of "settling" of the quantum strata.

Note retroactive continuity and the 20-year cycle of reality quakes is just an Infinity theory at this point. This is because no one on Kirby-2 is actually aware anything has changed! The theory is, since the reality quake alters the

entirely into being or perhaps causing the reality quake that altered Kirby-2 from a close parallel into the weird, unstable reality it has become.

- The comics are artifacts caused by a reality quake on Kirby-2, which spontaneously brought them into existence on Homeline where they didn't previously exist, another example of the parallel's unstable history and its possible (far-reaching) influence on the quantum continuum.

Whatever the case, for now Kirby-2 remains classified as a "weird" parallel and the comics are just another thing Infinity researchers have yet to understand about it (although they continue to study them *very* carefully). It is interesting to note the Pyramid Publishing comics haven't turned up on *any* other parallel yet, and all the comics' creators on Homeline are deceased (although with no evidence of foul play in any case).

The Eternals

Despite (or perhaps because of) Kirby's quantum instability and reality quakes, some individuals seem to remain fairly constant. It is probably no coincidence that these individuals are metahumans or close associates of metahumans. So far as anyone can tell, these "eternals" (as researchers have dubbed them) have a kind of Temporal Inertia. When Kirby's reality changes, they always exist, in one form or another. Note they do not always exist *unchanged;* some eternals "reincarnate" after a reality quake in a different, but similar, form or identity. Others remain fairly constant and unchanged by alterations in Kirby-2's history.

There is evidence of two broad types of eternals. The first, called "cyclical" eternals, seem to incarnate with each successive generation or era of Kirby-2's history. For example, there is evidence that the metahuman known as Warrior once existed as an American super-soldier during World War II. The same individual has also been a heartless American government operative in the 1960s, a

past, and everyone in the parallel is altered along with it, they remain unaware of the changes. There appear to be some metahumans with extrasensory perception capable of noticing some changes, and Infinity agents have noticed the occasional "continuity error," which first suggested the possibility that Kirby's reality changed on a fairly regular basis. Since then researchers have found subduction zones and other evidence of past reality quakes, strongly suggesting the theory is correct. There's no way to know for certain, however, without a great deal more observation and gathering evidence. It's at least *possible* some metahumans (particularly those with temporal or dimensional powers) may be aware of changes in continuity. Thus far, the need to preserve the Secret has kept Infinity from finding and questioning any of them.

Quantum Interaction

One thing Infinity (and Centrum) knows with some certainty: Kirby's quantum instability also makes it especially "permeable" to parachronic travel, sort of the reverse of a quantum sargasso. It has also apparently caused Kirby-2 to spawn a number of faint "echo parallels" that exist in very "close" proximity (in a nine-dimensional sense).

Interdimensional visitors are a regular occurrence on Kirby-2. Every major intertemporal power has at least discovered the parallel (despite the best efforts to keep it a secret), and most have visited at least once. There's evidence of Infinity, Centrum, Reich-5, and Cabal presence on Kirby-2. There are also banestorms, parachronozoids, random world-jumpers, and a seemingly endless variety of intertemporal flotsam and jetsam tossed up on the parallel's shores.

The existence of parallel worlds is not widely known on Kirby-2, but the U.N. and UNISON know, as do the major governments. Thus far, their ability to interact with these other realities is limited to a few metahuman world-jumpers and gate-makers. Both Infinity and Centrum are agreed on the fact that Kirby-2 must *not* develop parachronic technology, although both are also aware they may not be able to prevent it. Infinity is considering the possibility of forging an alliance with UNISON against Centrum, while Centrum is considering the same thing, although Interworld is also floating a plan to deliberately trigger another reality quake on the parallel, to either "regress" Kirby-2 so its inhabitants no longer pose a threat, or even to deliberately destroy the parallel and eliminate the threat it poses to the continuum. For the moment the plan has little support in the Centrum, until the change caused by the quake can be calculated and predicted with greater certainty.

hard-edged mercenary and agent of the United Nations in the 1980s, and now a current agent of UNISON in the 21st century. Some elements of the Warrior's background have remained constant (he's always been a highly-skilled "super-normal" soldier), while others have changed; he had far more cybernetic parts in the 1960s, none at all in the 1940s; his politics were more right-wing in earlier eras and have become more moderate. Note, however, that no one (including the Warrior himself) recalls these earlier "incarnations." According to Kirby-2's current history, the Warrior wasn't even *born* until the 1960s. The only evidence of his previous existence can be found in subduction zones and the artifacts recovered from them.

The other type of eternal found on Kirby-2 is the so-called "steady state" eternal, someone whose personal history remains largely unaltered by reality quakes, maintaining a continuity that's unbroken for the most part. The British metahuman John Bull is an example of this type. Although he's well over 80 years old, he still retains a youthful vigor and looks like a distinguished gentleman in his 50s (at most). The hero of Great Britain has a history stretching back to the 1940s, when he first gained his metahuman powers. The only changes involve other people. For example, the same evidence of the Warrior's existence during World War II suggests he and John Bull were both comrades and friendly rivals. However, in present Kirby-2 continuity, John Bull is decades older, Warrior never fought in WWII, and the two of them didn't even meet until recently. Still, their relationship remains similar, although John Bull is now the "elder statesman" and a part of their rivalry is founded in the British hero's long-standing reputation and Warrior's role as a "young turk."

Infinity researchers speculate about one other type of "temporal individual" on Kirby-2, the opposite of the eternal, known for now as a "transient" (also a "fad" by some). These are people with the Unique disadvantage. A reality quake apparently wipes them out of existence entirely, except for any evidence that may linger in subduction zones and the like. Since transients are so thoroughly erased from existence, they remain only a theory, at least until Infinity has the opportunity to actually witness a reality quake on Kirby-2.

Of great interest to all intertemporal factions is the fact that a form of time-travel also seems to exist on Kirby-2. The parallel has a number of interconnected "echo" parallels reflecting earlier points in Kirby's (current) history. Interventions in these echoes can apparently trigger a reality quake, changing history and the present-day on Kirby-2. Both Infinity and Centrum conveyors can reach Kirby's echoes (one of the reasons researchers believe they *are* echoes and not the parallel's "true" past). Some native time-jumpers and superscience gadgets can do the same. There is some debate about interventions in the echoes to interfere with Kirby's present. The most terrifying possibility involves a Reich-5 plan to intervene in an echo of Kirby's Second World War to create a "mirror" of their own history.

The Golden Age

The earliest discrete "alternate" of Kirby-2's history that Infinity has been able to isolate spans the period from 1939 to 1959 (local year). It, and the other alternates discovered thus far, have been tagged with comic book terms by researchers. Thus this is Kirby-2's "Golden Age."

The first metahumans appeared in late 1939. Their powers were nowhere near as impressive as those of modern-day metahumans, but they were still capable of ignoring bullets, lifting cars, and leaping tall buildings. There may have been a real alien invasion coinciding with Orson Welles "War of the Worlds" broadcast on Halloween. A number of masked "mystery men" also appeared, some with low-level metahuman powers or gadgets, others apparently normal humans (or as normal as heroes on Kirby-2 ever get). Metahumans fought on both sides of World War II, although they apparently didn't change the outcome of the war much. Evidence of the Golden Age begins to taper off in the post-war years.

In Kirby-2's current history, the first metahumans appeared around the same time, but their powers were weaker and their existence kept secret. Most worked as agents for various governments or were independent vigilantes. During WWII, metahumans served intelligence and special operations organizations. They had even less overall impact on the war, which followed virtually the same course as on Homeline.

The Silver Age

Scattered evidence suggests Kirby-2's "Silver Age" began with a reality quake that overturned its previous Golden Age history around 1959. Many Golden Age metahumans "reincarnated" in the new continuum, along with many new metahumans. It appears the Silver Age had the highest population of metahumans on Kirby-2 to date. This period also featured the greatest quantum instability, according to Infinity researchers. Irruptors from the time indicated reality in Kirby-2 was, to quote one researcher, "as wacky as a cartoon." Some suggest the start of a pattern to the reality quakes, with Kirby-2 becoming more fantastic (and

Other Kirbys

Worldlines with true metahumans are relatively rare (at least so far as Infinity has explored), however, there is one other worldline carrying the "Kirby" tag and at least two others that deserve it (once they're discovered).

Kirby-1 (Quantum 5, local year 2011) has no metahumans, but does feature rampant super-science, starting with "Edison's War" from 1900-1908: a conflict between the Russo-German-Austrian Axis and the rest of Europe and the United States. Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, and other inventors built hovercraft, machine guns, tanks, airships and other technological wonders, and the Allies defeated the Axis with them. Since then, President Teddy Roosevelt's League of Free Nations has assumed a position much like the UN on Kirby-2 or the World Science Council on Gernsback and technology has progressed rapidly.

Kirby-3 (Quantum 5, local year 2008) is very similar to Kirby-2 with one important difference: on the surface UNISON appears to be an organization devoted to peace, justice, and harnessing metahuman powers to improve the lot of all humanity. However, UNISON's public face is just a cover for a far more sinister agenda, and all the accusations of its detractors on Kirby-2 are true here: the United Nations wants to create a totalitarian world government using their monopoly on certain technologies and enforced by metahuman stromtroopers. Essentially, everything "good" on Kirby-2 is "evil" here. Neither Infinity nor Centrum have discovered this worldline yet, and both will be quite concerned when they do!

Kirby-4 (Quantum 4, local year 1941) has just seen the emergence of metahumans as the United States enters World War II. Metahuman powers are generally low-level by Kirby-2 standards, although there are still metahumans capable of lifting tanks.

less stable on a quantum level) from the Golden to Silver Ages, stabilizing somewhat through the Iron Age, then an upswing toward a less-stable quantum level in the present. This may indicate Kirby-2 will become more like its previous Silver Age as time progresses.

Kirby-2's "original" Silver Age featured numerous public costumed metahumans, alien invasions, lost worlds, and many of the fantastic elements found in the Pyramid Publishing comic books on Homeline. How close reality conformed to those comics (or vice versa) remains unclear.

In Kirby-2's current history, metahumans existed during the 1960s and '70s, but where less powerful and more covert. Many of them worked for government agencies during the Cold War as spies. A few others were part of the youth counter-culture, and experimentation with drugs, meditation, and mysticism may have unlocked or triggered some metahuman powers.

The Iron Age

Although the most recent of Kirby-2's "ages," what researchers have dubbed its "Iron Age" also seems to have left the least evidence. It apparently stretched from 1979 to the Millennial quake at the end of 1999 and represented a fundamental shift away from the instability of the Silver Age period. Metahumans became less common and their powers somewhat more limited. There is some evidence of metahuman -- and ordinary human -- vigilantes taking the law into their own hands to hunt down and even execute criminals. Guns and body armor were as common as metahuman powers.

This period seems to have shifted the least in the Millennial reality quake, lending some support to the theory that the historical changes become more pronounced the further back in history one goes from the point of change. In Kirby-2's current history, metahumans were still active in the 1980s and '90s, many of them as vigilantes, and there was a growing consensus among governments and societies that some means of regulating these new "super-powers" was required, similar in many ways to anti-proliferation and regulation of nuclear weapons on other Earths.

The Millennium Quake

Apparently, the last major ontological shift in Kirby-2 occurred on January 1st, 2000 on or around 12:00 A.M. Eastern Standard Time. As it so happens, this was during the time in the present history when a Dr. Paul VanZandt was studying quantum dynamics at Dartmouth. He later

The Allied and Axis powers are beginning to recruit and train metahumans for espionage and combat. Reich-5 would certainly take interest in this worldline and attempt to assist the local Third Reich in achieving victory.

Kirby-2 and *GURPS IST*

Owners of *GURPS International Super Teams* may notice similarities between Kirby-2 and the IST worldline. There are a few possible explanations for these. GMs may feel free to use any, all, or none of these as best suits the campaign.

First, it's possible the similarities are just that, parallels between the two worldlines. The IST Earth (or just "IST" in Infinity parlance) may exist elsewhere in the quantum continuum. Infinity may have already discovered it, making it just another Earth with metahumans. Alternately, perhaps Infinity hasn't discovered IST yet, but Centrum *has*. Some elements of the United Nations on IST would appeal to Centrum, much like the U.N. on Kirby-2 does. Centrum would be (cautiously) infiltrating, looking for opportunities to direct IST's U.N. toward a more Centrum-like worldview. There's also the possibility of an "IST-2" version of IST-Earth where the U.N. is corrupt and rules a world-spanning hegemony backed up by its metahuman enforcers (like Kirby-3). This world also poses opportunities for Centrum and a problem for Infinity (as well as a source of adversaries for Kirby-2 heroes).

Second, the Earth from *GURPS IST* might have *been* Kirby-2 at some point! Perhaps the IST-Earth was what Kirby-2 was like in the 1980s and '90s before the millennial reality quake. In *GURPS Y2K,* IST supers noticed a mysterious "Wall" after January 1, 2000 preventing precognitives from seeing the future beyond that point. This Wall could have been caused by an imminent reality quake; there literally was no "future" to foresee! If this is the case various subduction zones and irruptors related to the old IST world could show up in Kirby-2, and new versions of some existing characters and elements can appear in modern-day Kirby-2 (and, in fact, already do). Perhaps one or more of them hopes to undo the "damage" caused by the reality quake, restoring the world's "true" future (from their point of view). This can pose an interesting problem for heroes. Do they allow the world they know to be erased to restore another reality that no longer exists?

abandoned his theories on interdimensional travel when he made a breakthrough in quantum teleportation. Was this parallel version of Homeline's Dr. VanZandt somehow responsible for the most recent reality quake, or even *all* of them? Needless to say, placing blame on Dr. VanZandt, even a parallel version, is a somewhat awkward position to take in Infinity Unlimited, but some still wonder.

Finally, you can just ignore the similarities. There are certainly stranger things about Kirby-2 to worry about, and enough unusual similarities across the Infinite Worlds in general not to make a big deal about it.

In March of 2000, Kirby-2's Dr. VanZandt discovered practical cold fusion. Keeping his discoveries under wraps, VanZandt contacted a number of associates and presented his findings in a closed session of the UN Security Council. There VanZandt and his scientific and scholarly colleagues offered a most unusual proposal.

The UN accepted and, not long thereafter, issued a startling announcement to the world: Member nations of the UN would outlaw weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and military use of metahumans. In return, they would receive access to the new technology the UN controlled: cold fusion and teleportation for starters, with much more in the works. In addition, member nation metahumans would be eligible to join UNISON, the United Nations International Superhuman Operations Network, and UNISON teams would respond to aid requests from UN members, and act to enforce UN edicts. A number of metahumans were already pledged to work with the new program, and many more signed up.

The world was stunned, but no major nation wanted to be left out in the cold. So most agreed to the UN's edicts. Overnight, the United Nations went from an impotent diplomatic appendage to the world's greatest super-power. Licensing fees from its technology provided wealth far in excess of the dues the UN no longer required, granting it the financial independence to do as it wished.

* * *

Next time: The future is what you make it . . .

Having Some Friends For Dinner

. . .And Other Acts Of Cannibalism In *Unknown Armies*

By Bevan Thomas

I'm hunger. I'm thirst. Where I bite, I hold till I die, and even after death, they must cut out my mouthful from my enemy's body and bury it with me.
-C. S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*

Most modern human societies see cannibalism as monstrous, repugnant, and fundamentally foreign. This shocking symbolic potency makes it an excellent source of magical power, for much of the occult underground thrives on monstrosity and transgression.

Here then are various ways to incorporate cannibalism into **Unknown Armies:** a magick school, an archetype, and a new kind of revenant, as well as various rumors and plot hooks. Due to the disturbing nature of the subject matter, the stuff here is meant for adversaries, not player characters. The GM should think very carefully before allowing the players to create cannibal PCs.

As a note, knowingly committing cannibalism requires a rank 8 Self stress check (rank 10 if the person is someone you care about). This means that long-standing Androphages and avatars of the Cannibal are often insane with warped senses of self. Some such individuals or cabals have developed meditative and religious rituals to help balance and sooth their spirits, attempting to cling to their sanity as long as they can.

"It's pretty damn weird to eat people."
"He didn't just eat their bodies, you pig! He ate their souls! He loved them in a way that was absolute and clean and perfect!"
"And you joined in."
"Yes . . . oh, yes . . . "
-Frank Miller, *Sin City: The Hard Goodbye*

The Androphage

AKA Cannibals, Lecters

You know that the law of the universe is to consume. Each of us feeds upon those around us, consuming their time, their success, their luck, their joy. You just take it one step further. It's not that you hate others. Far from it. You love them so much that you want to make them a part of you forever.

You're hungry. You've always been hungry. But for most of your life, you didn't know what you were truly hungry for or what was needed to fill your belly. But that's all changed now. You know what you need. You need people.

Every human is a unique and precious thing. Each one carries the light of a wondrous mind and soul wrapped in a beautiful shell of flesh. It is for this light that you hunger. You want to drink it and consume its shell. You need to feed on the flesh, the minds, even the souls of those around you. You need to make them yours.

The first time was the hardest. You knew that you were taking an irreversible step outside of society, outside of normal human existence, even outside of yourself. Once you crossed that line, donned that label, there was no return. Freak, pervert, and monster are some of the less unpleasant words for you, but they won't be spoken if no one knows. Let the walking food-of-life go about its day-to-day activities with no idea of your secret, special life.

There are those you would teach the rapture of man-eating. Worthies who should be awakened to their inner beast. To them, you preach your gospel and lead them towards the divine meal. They should be brought into your Way.

You love humanity with all your heart. Everyone is sweeter than honey, richer than cake, and more precious than the finest wine. You could experience them forever, exploring every morsel and savoring every memory. You love humanity so much, and yet . . . and yet, you don't feel as connected to it as you used to.

The central paradox of Androphagy is that it is about experiencing people by destroying them, only truly understanding the ones you devour. And the more you absorb from your victims, the less sure you feel of your own identity or even your humanity.

Like Thanatomancy and Personamancy, Androphagy is an ancient magick school. It was likely one of the first, practiced by adepts at the dawn of humanity, and will likely be one of the last. Humanity will always find itself important, and there will always be those who seek to enjoy the people around them in a "special" intimacy. The Cannibal is always a part of us because it ultimately is us in a way that we cannot know until we eat beside it or are eaten by it.

Androphage Blast Style

Bite marks appear all over the victim's body as his flesh is bitten off and consumed by a multitude of invisible mouths. The cannibal casting the blast tastes the flesh as if she herself were eating it, but it is purely a sensory experience, not satisfying hunger in any way. The teeth marks are identical to those of the cannibal in question, which is revealed if the wounds are properly analyzed.

Stats

Generate a Minor Charge: Eat a half a pound of human flesh or participate in a religious ritual in which flesh is metaphorically consumed (such as taking communion).

Generate a Significant Charge: Eat the part of a person that most defined his life (such as a runner's leg, a philosopher's brain, or a philanderer's genitals). You gain two significant charges if the person granted you permission, of her own free will, to consume her body after death.

Generate a Major Charge: Convert someone to cannibalism. To do this, you must convince someone who has never consumed human flesh and has no strong desire to do so to knowingly share a full meal with you. You may not coerce them, though you may take advantage of their physical or spiritual hunger.

Taboo: If you ever disrespect your prey, you lose all the charges you're carrying (and automatically lose any of the traits or attributes that you've temporarily "borrowed"). To maintain respect, personally thank your prey by name before eating it (thus requiring you to learn your prey's name beforehand, if it has one). While eating it, maintain whatever you see as proper customs surrounding eating -- whether that means an uninterrupted frenzy or a civilized dinner party. Do not allow your prey to spoil or go to waste. Do not, under any circumstances, regurgitate your prey. You also must never insult nor lose your temper around your prey (such as acting on your Rage passion).

Random Magick Domain: Androphagy is about drawing upon the energy and power of those the adept consumes as well as filling others with the Cannibal's energy and fear. A lecter could absorb her prey's appearance, traits, thoughts, even a piece of his soul. She could also fill his mind with either the desperate terror of the hunted or the savage joy of the hunter.

Starting Charges: Beginning Androphages start with five minor charges.

Charging Tips: Through grave-robbery and religious service, Androphages could gain 2-6 minor charges and 1 significant charge each day without too much difficulty. Unless the cannibal has some special resource (such as a job as a mortician or a few victims locked in the cellar), trying to gain charges in excess of this has an excellent chance of

attracting unwanted attention.

Androphagy Minor Formula Spells

Eat of My Body

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: Roll to cast this like any other spell. Heal a number of health points equal to the sum of the two dice in your roll. For this to work, you, or the person to be healed, must eat human flesh while you cast the spell and smear blood on the wound. This cannot be used on damage you, or another cannibal, has inflicted.

Feast of the Cannibal

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: This is the Androphagy minor blast. As described above, the victim is attacked by invisible, hungry mouths.

Skin-Thief

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: By eating the skin off a person's face, you can take on his facial appearance until the next time you sleep. Alternately, you could consume his tongue to gain his voice, the meat off his right foot to gain his walk, etc. Thus, multiple castings should be made and multiple body parts consumed to make the disguise truly effective. Lasts until the next time you sleep.

Mark of the Beast

Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: The target of the spell recognizes you as the ruthless, monstrous predator that you are. This forces a Violence-8, and might trigger the target's Fear passion.

Talk to Your Food

Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: If you eat a human's tongue, you gain one piece of information known by the individual. This information is not detailed enough to result in any increases in skills (for that use *Food for Thought*), but could, for example, give the password on a safety deposit box, reveal the names of associates in a cabal, or discover where the victim had hidden the artifact she stole.

Food for Thought

Cost: 3 minor charges
Effect: By eating a person's brain, you can temporarily gain one of his or her nonmystical skills. You now know the skill at the same level as your prey did (and if you already possess that skill, you add the levels together). However, the final skill cannot be higher than the governing stat (so if you have Soul 60 and Charm 30%, and your prey has Charm 40%, then the enhanced skill is Charm 60%). This skill increase lasts until you fall asleep, at which point your skill drops down to its normal level (or vanishes completely if you do not naturally possess it).

Androphagy Significant Formula Spells

Bloody Banquet

Cost: 1 significant charge.
Effect: This is the Androphagy significant blast.

Man-Eater's Kiss

Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: By surreptitiously feeding a person a small piece of human flesh, you can fill her with a cannibal's hunger. The target must make a rank 7 Self stress check or attempt to devour the nearest human who is not an Androphage. While the spell is in effect, the person behaves like a wild beast: incapable of speech (snarling and growling instead) and fighting with only her nails and teeth. She viciously defends against any threats and otherwise focuses on satisfying her hunger. If no humans are present in the area, she may attack and consume animals, but these will not satisfy her. If she is presented with human flesh (or manages to kill a person), then she will happily eat the flesh raw and bloody. Once the grisly meal is finished, you may either let the spell elapse, or may make a second check with a +20 shift against the victim's Soul stat to hold them under the effects. No matter what happens, the spell ends after thirty-three minutes.

Wail of the Wendigo

Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: If you have ever tasted a particular person's blood, you and he become linked, and you can use the power of his blood to draw him to you. By invoking this link with this spell, your target feels a strong compulsion to come to you, so much that he must make a rank 7 Self stress check every minute to resist. In all likelihood, he will not consciously know what has compelled him or even where exactly he is going, simply that he has an overpowering urge to go there. The target uses the quickest means that he has convenient access to (so if he owns a car, he'll drive, if he doesn't, he'll probably take the bus). The spell ends the moment the person comes within eyeshot of you or after three hours are up, whatever comes first. This spell is often used to lead prey into the adept's clutches.

Headhunting

Cost: 3 significant charges
Effect: Invest the Cannibal's power in a trophy taken from a victim in order to access his obsession skill. To create this fetish, you must eat all of a human's flesh, and then extract one of the victim's bones. This bone must be at least an inch long and be related to the victim's obsession skill (such as a piece of his skull for Physics or a finger for Struggle). You may only attempt to produce a fetish once for each victim, and mystical skills (such as archetypes or magick schools) maybe not be turned into fetishes.

As long as you are in contact with the fetish, you may choose to gain +20 in the relevant skill as long as it does not take the skill above either the controlling stat or the level that the victim had in the skill (however, you do not get to flip-flop the skill, as it is not your obsession). You can only use one fetish at a time, though can carry more on your person if you wish (many Androphages string a series of fetishes on a necklace for easy access). A fetish can only be used by the lecter who created it, and is as it is made from bone, it is quite fragile. If broken, a fetish's power is permanently destroyed.

Io, Bacchus

Cost: 3 significant charges
Effect: A group of people feels the maddening presence of the Cannibal and either instinctually flees from the horrible apparition or feels its passion thunder through their souls. Either way, they are driven into a frenzy, and begin to riot. This functions in an identical manner to the Urbanomancer's spell the Madness of Crowds (see p. 158 of the ***Unknown Armies*** rulebook).

Make a Meal of a Summer's Day

Cost: 3 significant charges
Effect: Eat a human's brain to gain the whole of their memories concerning a particular subject. For example, you could experience a person's memories of his spouse or of the cabal he was a part of or the secret plan he was engaged in (however, this spell cannot provide new skills, for that use Headhunting). Instantly gaining years of strange memories is necessitates a rank 5 Self stress check.

Skin the Soul

Cost: 3 significant charges
Effect: Eat a human's heart. As long as the spell lasts, you are indistinguishable from that person. You look, sound, move, and feel like him (however, you still possess any mutilation which produced Androphage charges). You even possess all of the person's skill at his level (though they can be no higher than your governing stats). All of the spell's effects end at the next sunrise.

Androphagy Major Effects

Adapt so completely the identity of someone you devoured that no one is able to tell the difference, even through magick. Cause a crowd of people to tear someone to pieces and devour his flesh. Consume a person's brain and instantly learn everything that he knew. Permanently reduce a person's mind to that of a ravening beast.

What You Hear: The Androphage

A powerful and mysterious Androphage known only as the Connoisseur has figured out how to eat the life of the adepts' prey, getting a couple of years younger by devouring people in the prime of their lives. It is rumoured that the Connoisseur has been doing this for decades, if not centuries.

* * *

The Cannibal

Attributes: This archetype is hunger in its most raw, most consuming form. The Cannibal is the ultimate glutton, whose need is so great that he is prepared to break one of the most fundamental of human laws to feed his aching belly. He is a bogeyman who preys upon humanity, a creature of shadow and terror who consumes their flesh and drinks their blood.

The Cannibal embodies transgression and the power achieved by those who are willing to set themselves apart from normal morality, forging their own dark path away from humanity. He savors each drop of blood and each piece of meat that disappears between his hungry lips, not only devouring his victims' flesh, but also their thoughts, their attributes, their spirits.

Taboo: The Cannibal is a slave to his hunger, gluttony manifest in its most savage form. Because of this, he must never leave his gastronomic needs unsatisfied. When hungry, he must eat or seek food if he has none, when thirsty, he must drink or seek water. The food does not need to human flesh, but it must at least be something. If the only food available is unfit for consumption, he must eat it anyway -- this is about his stomach, not his mind.

Symbols: The color red, animal teeth, the full moon, and human skulls are all strongly linked to the Cannibal, as are such movies as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Silence of the Lambs.* Predatory animals are strong totems, particularly sharks, tigers, wolves, and various mythic bogeymen such as ogres, vampires, and werewolves. Perhaps the most consistently powerful symbol is that of the monster masks, ranging from cheap plastic ones worn at Halloween to the complex carved images used in tribal ceremonies.

Masks: Bacchus (Greco-Roman), Baxbakwalanuxsiwae (Kwakiutl), Coatlicue (Aztec), Kali (Hindu), Wendigo

(Algonquin)

Suspected Avatars in History: Throughout history, desperate people have turned to cannibalism in order to stave off starvation, such as the crew of the ship *Medusa,* members of the Donner Party, and the survivors of Uruguayan Air Force Flight 571. It is likely that many of these individuals were at least unconscious avatars of the Cannibal. It is almost certain that the most dedicated followers of such secret societies as the Hamatsa channelled him as well.

Channels

1-50%: For every half-pound of human flesh you eat, you gain back 3 wound points.

51-70%: You possess an unnatural sense of smell, and is able to smell both physical and metaphysical things. You may use your Avatar: The Cannibal check in the place of Aura Sight or Notice when relevant. Of course, as it is relying on a difference sense, some things will be detectable with Avatar: The Cannibal that are not with Notice, and vice versa (you could sense whether someone was sweating and that he had traces of perfume on him, but would not be aware of his unusually designed cufflinks or where he had cut himself shaving).

71-90%: You are able to use your Avatar: The Cannibal check in the place of any skills which is currently directly being used to hunt humans (such as Tracking to locate your prey, Run to chase him, Firearms to kill him, etc.). If either your Avatar skill or the skill being replaced is your obsession, you may flip-flop the roll. This channel only works if you intend to eat the person in question.

91%+: At this level, you are so attuned to the raging beast within you that you may call upon its power in combat. While possessed by the Cannibal, your teeth elongate into fangs and your nails into talons, with a +3 (penetrating) and +6 (heavy and penetrating) bonus to damage respectively. Furthermore you gain +10 to Body and Speed (with a corresponding increase in wound points), and ignore wound penalties and stress checks. However, while in this berserker rage, you may do nothing except strike at your enemies with your teeth and claws (as well as anyone else who seeks to prevent your mad attack). Once all your opponents are dead, you begin to eat the corpses, and only after you can eat no more do you return to your normal self. However, you may make an Avatar: The Cannibal check at 20 in order to prematurely return to your senses. This check may be reattempted each round without additional penalty, but only after you have spent at least three rounds possessed by the Cannibal.

* * *

Revenant: The Ravenous

The Ravenous are a particularly malevolent kind of revenant that is formed from people who died of starvation. Enraged at their wretched demise and hungry for any kind of sustenance, their tormented spirits are kept on this side of the Veil by the desires to see the living pay for what the revenants perceive as their callous abandonment. Since people didn't feed the Ravenous in life, these revenants have decided that they will feed them in death. To cling to their twisted unlife, they must consume human flesh.

Like the Wronged (see ***Postmodern Magick,*** p. 133), the Ravenous link to particular innocent individuals before engaging in their horrific actions. These revenants favor the most innocent hosts possible, for it gives them great pleasure to drag a virtuous soul into savage insanity. Most of the time, a Ravenous hides within its host's shadow, but when the host sleeps, the creatures goes hunting. To those who can see a Ravenous in its incorporeal state, the spirit looks like a shifting human shadow with red glowing eyes and a huge mouth full of long spectral teeth.

While linked to a Ravenous, the host's dreams are filled with glimpses of the revenant's actions seen from the spirit's point of view. The poor victim experiences the stalking, the attack, and the grisly meal almost as if he was responsible for it. He may even wake up with blood on his lips and under his fingernails. Eventually, he may come to believe himself responsible for these acts (likely resulting in numerous Stress checks). If the host dies or the Ravenous becomes bored of him, then the creature just moves on to someone else and the cycle begins again.

The Ravenous is a particularly potent revenant. It can generate six minor unnatural phenomena a day and two significant a week. It can also generate one major unnatural phenomenon a month. The phenomena are usually employed to stalk and frighten the Ravenous' prey, though they are sometimes used to torment the host and, if necessary, evade capture. When on the hunt, the revenant manifests a corporeal form with the appearance, along with the Body and Speed stats, of its host. It is affected by magick in the same manner as a demon.

A Ravenous must devour a human at least once a month, and usually tries to feed much more frequently than that. If it hasn't eaten in a month, then it loses 10 temporary Soul points from hunger, and for every additional week that it doesn't eat, it loses another 10 points. These lost points can be recovered through consumption, with 10 points recovered for each person consumed. If a Ravenous is ever reduced to zero Soul, it vanishes forever. Some believe that the spirit is obliterated, whereas others claim that it is drawn back across the Veil to face the judgment of the Cruel Ones.

Ravenous (Significant)

The Hungry Dead
Points: 30 + a percentile roll (1-100)
Body: 0
Speed: 10-40
Mind: 10-40
Soul: 50-80

Secrets, Rumors, And Legends

Here are discussed many different plot hooks and rumours tied to cannibalism that could be employed in an *Unknown Armies* campaign. This information is for GMs only, and thus all players should avert their virgin eyes.

1. Dion Isaacs (*Lawyers, Guns, and Money,* p. 77) is a white trash counterpart to Bacchus, Greco-Roman god of wine, revelry, and madness (also known as Dionysus), with his women being modern day Bacchante. This divine association may be coincidental, or Dion could be a lecter or an avatar of the Cannibal using the god's imagery to build up some metaphysical mojo. Some people even suspect that Dion may be an inhuman entity, possibly a particularly potent Ravenous or some force older and more powerful. Certain cannibals who have heard of him believe Dion Isaacs to be some sort of messiah, and quest through the United States, hoping to find the enigmatic individual. It is not known what Dion does with any who locate him.
2. An especially unhinged avatar of the Cannibal in British Columbia wishes to set up a modern version of the Hamatsa cult that operated years ago in the Pacific Northwest. As the man lacks any Native blood whatsoever, he is currently hunting down and devouring various people of Kwakiutl descent, hoping to eventually absorb enough of their essence to be recognized as a worthy recipient of the power of the Cannibal at the North End of the World. Though he has yet to catch the attention of any such spirit (if indeed the Cannibal exists as anything besides a mask for the archetype), his bodycount has attracted the attention of not only the police, but also the Sleepers, the New Inquisition, and possibly even the Order of St. Cecil. It is only a matter of time before one of them smacks him hard.
3. An enterprising Androphage has joined Mak Attax (though she has not revealed her magick school to her associates, masquerading instead as a clued-in mundane). When she passes along special orders to the customers, she often includes a small piece of human flesh in the burger (sometimes her own, sometimes someone else's), and occasionally she is able to switch a normal patty with one she had made herself from her prey. The woman wishes to awaken others to the joy and power of cannibalism, initiating them into her dark mysticism.
4. The relationship between Marcy McLaughlin and Andrew Cray (*Hush Hush,* p. 121) is an Androphage's wet dream. A lot of lecters have a twisted fascination, even affection for their prey, and yearn for people who would look forward to being consumed as much as the cannibals would look forward to consuming them. If McLaughlin manages to completely devour Cray, there is a chance her mind will completely shatter and she'll become an Androphage herself (desperate to achieve the same union with others that she achieved with Cray).
5. Many dukes speak in whispers of the Androphage known only as the Connoisseur. Legends of this individual

have been circulating for a while, so he, she, or it is either centuries of years old or is merely the last in a series of adepts who have adopted the name. The Connoisseur's existence has helped to increase the paranoia which so dominates the occult underground since there is always the possibility that anyone, even your closest friend, could be the Connoisseur wearing a stolen skin (with the bones of the original owner picked clean and lying in some unmarked grave). In fact, some particularly neurotic dukes have snapped, attacking or even murdering a dear companion because they were convinced that he had been replaced. There's a rumor going around that the Connoisseur is a friend, or even a lover, of the Freak. Some people have suggested that the Connoisseur keeps trying to convince the Freak to let itself be devoured by the Androphage (which, knowing that particular Epideromancer's extreme masochism and probable deep-set issues of personal identity, is a proposition it might hypothetically consider). Some people have even suggested that this has already happened, and that the being currently claiming to be the Freak is actually the Connoisseur in disguise!

Pyramid Review

Bleeding Edge Adventure #1: Mansion of Shadows (for the d20 System)

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by Robert J. Schwalb

Cover by Lisa Wood

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Cartography by The Forge Studios

48-page b&w softcover; $11.95
46-page 4.13-meg b&w PDF Document; $6.50

Mansion of Shadows is another scenario for the *d20 System.* It is another scenario for a party of 1st- to 3rd-level characters. Surely, after five years of *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition* (and *Edition 3.5*), the last thing the hobby needs is another scenario for starting characters? Well, perhaps. But *Mansion of Shadows* is from Green Ronin Publishing, and that is one indication of quality. After all, they released one of the very first adventures for the *d20 System,* and that still stands up as a classic.

In fact, *Mansion of Shadows* marks the return of the publisher to the adventure format after some time away. It is the first entry in the new *Bleeding Edge Adventure* series, intended as an alternative to the current trend in adventures that hark back in feel, style, and play to those published for *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons.* The series' aim is to present adventures that provide the DM with a good story that is easily dropped into most settings, but that is both self-contained in terms of rules and flexible enough to use in other games and settings. Which is a lot to deliver.

Fortunately, *Mansion of Shadows* manages to live up to these objectives. First, the story is good, offering a surprising degree of depth and complication given both the book's length and genre. Second, although the setting for the scenario as written is Green Ronin's "World of Freeport" (to be detailed in the forthcoming system-less sourcebook of the same name), it is merely a matter of changing a name here and there to set it else where. Be warned though, the adventure does not take place in *[Freeport: City of Adventure,](#)* but rather on the continental mainland nearby. Third, although the adventure references a selection of Green Ronin's other titles, including *[The Book of Fiends,](#) The Cavalier's Handbook,* the *Avatar's Handbook,* the *Book of Righteous,* the *Unearthed Arcana,* the *Advanced Player's Manual,* the *Advanced Gamemaster's Guide,* and the recently re-published *Freeport Trilogy* -- which is quite a bit -- this adventure both details what it needs from all of them and suggests alternatives from the core rulebooks where possible. Fourth, Green Ronin has already made available an enhancement that provides the statistics for the scenario for use with *True20 Adventure Roleplaying.*

[BEGIN SPOILER ALERT!]

The adventure opens with the characters traveling on the road from the Ivory Ports bound for the Bugbear and undead infested mountains known as the Towers. Ahead lies the hilly valley known as the Kirsvald, home to the village of Staufendorf, a popular stop for merchants before they enter the Narrow Pass that runs through the Towers. The journey has been uneventful so far, but the sounds of combat break the silence and the idyll. Investigating the sounds reveals a young knight in the woods under attack.

From this point, *Mansion of Shadows* follows two paths that try to take account of the players' actions and push them toward the adventure's denouement. In path one, the young knight introduces himself as Helmut Staufen, returning home to the family seat in the Kirsvald. As thanks for their aid, he invites the characters to not only join him for dinner, but also stay the night. Once within walls of the castle-like mansion, it is obvious that not all is as it seems -- the place is gloomy, the servants wary, the guards are supplemented with Orc thug soldiers, and Helmut's family display unsettling preoccupations.

In path two, the player characters either declined Helmut's invitation or failed to save him, and so travel onto Staufendorf. It is clear that all is not as it should be in the Kirsvald, with the road lined with bloodied crucifixes and fresh graves. The mood is equally as dismal in the village, where the shutters are drawn, buildings have been torched, and the streets empty bar patrolling villagers. It is not long before somebody comes to investigate the new arrivals. The village priest explains that he was until recently the Staufen family priest, but was thrown out after they fell under an ancient family curse. Since being taken in by the locals, the village has been victim to brutal attacks by the Staufen family soldiers. Although, the priest does not advocate violence, he implores the characters to bring peace to the village by assaulting the Staufen family seat.

It is here that the two paths converge, with the villagers storming the mansion. If the characters are already inside, the diversion gives them the opportunity to investigate further. If they are the attackers, then the oddness is waiting to be discovered . . . And yes, it does involve the ancient family curse, but to reveal more *would* spoil the decently done plot.

Despite the adventure having the two differing paths, the second is there to keep the party on track and moving towards the adventure's climax. The emphasis is on the first path, in which the players gain entrance to the mansion and are exposed to the peculiarities of its inhabitants. More specifically, this comes in the adventure's centerpiece, dinner with the Staufen family. This is not an easy scene for the DM to handle, given the number of NPCs he has to portray. The advice tells the DM to keep it simple and let the characters drive the interaction, which is probably best unless there is more than the one DM. The dinner is quickly followed by the events that lead to the exposure of the secrets and plots at the heart of *Mansion of Shadows.*

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Helpful advice is given throughout the book, much of it focusing upon what to do if the players send the scenario off the rails. Other advice gives pointers to particular rules in the *Core Books* or extra information that can add help color and personality to the adventure. One major section deals with the village mob's attack upon the mansion. Statistics are included so that their confrontation with the guards and soldiers can be handled using the mass combat rules from the *Advanced Player's Manual,* but a DM can also run the battle by the narrative or the representative methods, both of which are also discussed. In addition, the book details the fiendish state of the core family which is much in-keeping with the cosmology of the *Book of Fiends.* Despite the advice, this is not really an adventure suited for the neophyte DM.

Physically, *Mansion of Shadows* is a disappointment. Behind the decent cover, the rather plain layout suffers from merely average artwork and cartography. This isn't necessarily a detractive factor, but Green Ronin has most definitely published better looking books. Certainly the book's maps are far from what you would call "fantastic," a ridiculous claim made in the blurb. Green Ronin can do [fantastic maps](#), and these are most definitely not in the same league. Additionally, the book requires another proofread.

Penultimately though, you have to come back to the story at the heart of *Mansion of Shadows,* and that is the raisons d'être for both the scenario and the *Bleeding Edge Adventure* series. In the *Mansion of Shadows* that story is a gothic horror tale, one that harks back to the original *Dungeons & Dragons* gothic adventure, *I6 Ravenloft.* This scenario though lacks the scale and the innovations, but counters this with a tighter focus and a more detailed storyline, one that feels most definitely grim and perilous. Indeed, this scenario could very easily be run with *[Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay,](#)* the story awards that replace the more traditional Experience Point awards only serving to enhance the similarities in feel.

And ultimately, you have to ask whether *Mansion of Shadows* lives up to the objectives set out for the *Bleeding Edge*

Adventure line? The answer is a resounding yes! Although it is not a classic -- being disappointing in physical terms and the aftermath being a little underwritten -- **Bleeding Edge Adventure #1: Mansion of Shadows** is nevertheless a sound, solid, and assured scenario that kicks the series off to a good start and should provide several sessions of entertaining play.

--Matthew Pook

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

You Can't Fight The System, But Maybe You Can Get a New One

Having had some free time to do some research and soul-searching while at the World Yo-Yo Contest, I decided that it's been a while since I've done anything truly drastic with my life. So, when I got back, I decided to convert.

To Linux.

The transition went about as well as I'd realistically hoped, which is to say it took about a solid week of false starts, data-wrangling, and tweaking to get to a system that does most of what I need it to do. (In fact, it took about an hour to upload this week's Murphy's Rules, because of various wrangling with upload clients, file permissions, and finding the file in my new e-mail client.)

Strangely, I've dealt with Linux before in years past (I think I got rid of a hand-illuminated Red Hat 5.1 book before the move to Indy), so -- despite the blood, sweat, and tears -- I can honestly say that things have gotten *much* better in the Linux world than they were even a few years ago. Which is to say that things are still pretty stinky, and I doubt anyone who wasn't willing to spend a *lot* of time on Google would have a good time unless their needs were very modest. (This operating system clearly isn't targeted at Grandma, unless Grandma enjoys being tied up and whipped by strangers in masks.)

Anyway, having firmly formed the foundation of my tax write-off for all my Linux related pain and suffering, I can transition smoothly across the center line to the on-ramp of this discussion. Namely, transitioning from one operating system to another is *very* similar to transitioning from one game system to another, especially if you're trying to migrate an extant campaign. And the lessons I've learned in moving to Linux may hopefully prove illuminating to someone else in the gaming world. In fact, I'm doubly blessed, because I've migrated at least one long-running campaign from one system to another.

Be very sure you want to switch. Things will break; chaos will ensue. Usually there's one item, feature, or defining moment where you decide that you *really* want to switch once and for all. If that's the case, make sure that this item will be fully resolved by the game system you're switching to.

Regarding my Linux switch, my change of heart came from yet another evening of trying to get work done while fighting with Windows automatic updates, which were patching yet another round of security holes. ("Hi! I'm going to reboot in five minutes, unless you click 'No,' in which case I'll pop up this same box again in 10 minutes. Oh, and the focus of the box when it pops up is on 'Reboot Now.'") In my gaming switch, I wasn't very happy with the fact that I was having a *very* difficult time balancing power levels in my *GURPS Supers* campaign, and so I switched to *Hero System/Champions* in the hopes that it would be a slightly more point-based system. (At the time I also liked the aspect of *Champions* that required supers' players to pay points for useful equipment.) In both cases I was relatively confident that the switch in question would resolve my issues.

Form a game plan. This step is pretty obvious, but it can't be stated enough: Have a definite road map for how the game's going to fall into place (with enough wiggle room for when things go wrong). In the case of my *Champions* switch, everyone started with new characters in the same universe, neatly sidestepping the need to convert characters directly. (For NPCs who would be popping up again, I had an adventure in the works that would serve as kind of a "cosmic sweeping change" that would neatly explain any variances in power levels after that point.) In the case of my Linux conversion, most of my plan revolved around the order I would be getting data and applications up and running (web browser first, then e-mail, and so on).

Not only does the road map serve as a reminder list for what to do next, it also provides positive reinforcement since, as phases are completed, you get to cross items off; if you don't have one, you may be overwhelmed with the enormity of the task at hand and give up.

(As an aside, this "road map" was one of the many good things Wizards of the Coast/TSR did in the build-up to *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition.* In each issue of *Dragon* Magazine there would be articles about how to transition over, what to look forward to, "10 Ways To Start Playing 3rd Edition Now," and the like. *GURPS* did something similar in its own way by the release beforehand of the *Lite* edition and the teaser articles in this very mag.)

Be prepared to compromise and make changes. It's very likely that some aspects of the old game system that you took for granted before won't be possible in the new game, and you may find yourself scrambling to fix things you hadn't realized would break. In my *GURPS Supers* campaign I had grown accustomed to a very fast-paced, "roll the dice and see how pretty they look" style of GMing which really wasn't possible in the more mathematically rigid *Champions;* while I adjusted, future adventures had fewer combats so that I could concentrate on tweaking the pacing of the new game system.

Before, during, and after, talk over the decision to switch with anyone who the decision affects. Make sure you get any ideas or suggestions they might have, and make sure that the needs of the group are taken into account if at all possible. (You may also want to hit folks up for advice even if they *won't* be affected; "Get a mentor" is a sub-piece of advice under this heading.)

Although switching from one system can be a nightmare, it doesn't have to be. With a little forethought, a bit of hard work, and a focus on the goal, it's possible for everything to go smoothly.

Unless and until the campaign crashes with the Blue Screen of Death, of course.

--Steven Marsh

Shadows and Fogg, Part the Fourth

"'I am Phileas Fogg of London.'
'And I am Andrew Speedy of Cardiff.'
'You are leaving . . .'
'In an hour's time.'
'Where are you heading?'
'Bordeaux.'
'And your cargo?'
'Stones in the belly. No freight. I'm travelling ballasted.'"
-- Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days,* Chapter XXXII

Just before this eerie ritualistic exchange, Jules Verne describes Captain Speedy as having "a complexion of oxidized copper," which is to say, green. Is "Andrew Speedy, of Cardiff" a Reptoid? Perhaps it is but a coincidence that the dinosaur-descended birds, like some reptiles today, swallow "stones in the belly" to aid digestion. Or perhaps the "stones in the belly" indicate the gods devoured by Saturn, god of time. Is Speedy indicating that he is part of the temporal conspiracy MI-8, or whichever one it is that Fogg actually belongs to? Or that his allegiance is actually to Ahnenerbe, or the Sphinxes, who wish to return Earth to its [original orbit](#) around the ringed planet? Or perhaps "stones in the belly" refers to the cargo of anomalous meteorites that Fogg has hypothetically been gathering on his 1872 (or 1858, if we are to believe an early draft of Verne's novel) voyage around the world. Meteorites such as the Marblehead meteorite of 1858, regarding whose meteoric origins scientific investigators of the time found "negative evidence." Just our kind of evidence. Very suspicious. Meteors from nowhere, and a Reptoid from Wales, leaving in an hour's time.

Oh, right. For those just joining us, we're journeying around *Around the World in Eighty Days* in eighty hundred words or thereabouts, and we're almost done. In our [first leg](#), we decided that, of the time-war conspiracies from the [200th Transmission](#), Fogg was most likely an agent of MI-8, and hinted that Verne himself has some shady Rosicrucian connections, perhaps with the Prieuré Sion themselves. And we realized one can map Fogg's eighty days around the world to either the 36 decans (matching the 37 chapters of the novel -- the first and last overlap), the twelve signs of the zodiac (matching the 12 legs of the journey in Fogg's ledger), or the eightfold turning of the year (matching Verne's own summary of the voyage in eight legs, in Chapter III). In our [second leg](#), we proposed that Fogg was laying some sort of ley line into the blank and twisty reaches of India Ultraterrestria, and playing rather a dangerous hand of Tarot whist the while, although it's always his valet Passepartout who winds up dead. On our [third leg](#), we noted a similar pattern in America Ultraterrestria, and that Fogg has now beaten Death, dueled with the Green Knight, and possibly retrieved a Grail of some (meteoric?) sort. And we learned all of this by reading Verne's novel very, very closely. Closely enough to see the patterns that always seem to emerge in these instances.

" Nevertheless, some way of sailing across the Atlantic had to be found -- unless it was to be crossed by balloon -- which would have been highly risky and, in any case, impossible."
-- Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days,* Chapter XXXII

And in the absence of such a close reading, one can be forgiven for believing that Fogg and party at some point travel by balloon during their voyage. After all, such a balloon appears in all three filmed versions of the novel, and Jules Verne made his name with *Five Weeks in a Balloon,* about a trip across Africa in a lighter-than-air craft. Verne's close friend "Nadar" was a pioneer balloonist, and possibly tied in with the "Angelic Society" -- what, after all could be more elevating than flight? But there is no balloon in *Around the World in Eighty Days,* and the absence aches like a missing tooth. One suspects that Verne is covering something up. 1872 is not a particularly fruitful year for UFO sightings, although there were two sightings 44 days apart over Grand Island and Muskegon, Michigan -- though in the summer, before Fogg (allegedly) left London. On December 7, 1872, conversely, while Fogg is in America, a "burning hayrick" appears over Banbury in England. Distractions? Reflections? Sorcerous static? In Verne's first-draft year of 1858, on the other hand, a "large and wondrously constructed vessel . . . worked by wheels and mechanical appendages" of extraordinary precision and beauty appeared (according to a contemporary publication, *The Illustrated Silent Friend*) over Jay, Ohio. This is the heyday of the strange and enigmatical [Sonora Aero Club](#), with its own eerie

parallels to Verne's Robur the Conqueror, building secret airships on a hidden American plateau. But Verne, as I say, keeps silent -- wisely, in retrospect, given that his publishing Robur's story in 1886 led (as we learned last time) to an assassination attempt carried out by his own nephew.

"I'm collecting notes upon persons supposed to have been struck by lightning. I think that high approximation to positivism has often been achieved -- instantaneous translation -- residue of negativeness left behind, looking much like effects of a stroke of lightning. Some day I shall tell the story of the Marie Celeste *-- 'properly' . . . mysterious disappearance of a sea captain, his family, and the crew --"*
-- Charles Fort, *The Book of the Damned*

And that's not even the biggest mystery Verne dances around. While Fogg is traveling across the Pacific on the *General Grant,* another ship, the *Mary Celeste,* is crossing the Atlantic. Some time between November 25, 1872 (while Fogg is somewhere north of Hawaii) and December 3, 1872 (a day Fogg spends in San Francisco -- convenient to Sonora and its Aero Club?), the crew of the *Mary Celeste* vanished into thin air. The good ship *Dei Gratia* discovered the derelict on December 4 with her cargo of alcohol (almost) intact, her longboat gone, her hatches open, and three and a half feet of water in the hold. Perhaps most significantly for the temporally focused nature of the Fogg Working, the *Mary Celeste* was missing both her sextant and her chronometer.

The opposite fate occurs on Fogg's transatlantic passage, on board the steamer *Henrietta,* which is burned to the hull plate as the passengers (and time) are relentlessly tracked across the ocean, even carved into the global cantosphere. The *Henrietta* is paid for "twice over" despite being burnt, a kind of [phoenix](#) ritual (during the fiery Leo leg of the voyage) in the empty Atlantic. The *Mary Celeste* becomes a kind of photo-negative proxy for Fogg's passage, an Opener of the Way across the Atlantic, its crew a sacrificial scapegoat given over to whoever -- or Whatever -- opposes the implacable, machine-like Englishman.

" These are dangerous waters. In the winter especially, there are very frequent fogs, and the storms are formidable. The day before the barometer had gone down abruptly, and it was now giving warning of an impending change in the atmosphere. And indeed the temperature changed during the night, the cold became sharper, and at the same time the wind veered to the south-east."
-- Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days,* Chapter XXXIII

And in the novel, as he crosses the Atlantic Fogg finds himself opposed by -- fog. The way across the water turns cloudy and cold, congealing like the sea encountered by [Brendan the Blest](#) when he crossed the other direction 13 centuries before. The fog recalls the "uniform whiteness" of America Ultraterrestria, a "uniform whiteness" of blank spots on the map and the charnel houses of the Sphinx that Fogg had thought left behind in Indian country. In the novel, Fogg merely bulls ahead through sheer English stubbornness, but Verne left plenty of hints in his other works. In his 1897 novel *The Sphinx of the Ice,* Verne wrote a sequel to [Poe's](#) *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym,* in which his heroes travel through a curtain of fog to discover Pym impaled on a gigantic magnetic Sphinx. Of course the novel, set in 1839, directly contradicts Poe's story, which is narrated by a surviving Pym in 1836. Again, Verne hints at a time-nexus, a vortex similar to the one that swallowed, and perhaps over-wrote, or duplicated, Captain Nemo in 1868. Clearly, to get across the Atlantic, to get through the barrier of uniform whiteness that carries his own name, Fogg must sacrifice himself; he must die and be reborn. Is the ritual sacrifice (beginning on December 19, the Opalia, the feast of Ops, a Roman aspect of Cybele) of the *Henrietta* (and of the crew of the *Mary Celeste*) enough? Apparently it is, at least enough to put off the confrontation with himself (or his vortex-spawned double) until he lands in Liverpool.

"The honourable gentleman vanished and his place was taken by the thief of the banknotes. His photograph, available at the Reform Club with those of all his colleagues, was duly studied. Every single feature in it appeared identical to those of the description produced by the enquiries."
-- Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days,* Chapter V

In Liverpool, Fogg is clapped in jail as a bank robber, imprisoned for the actions of his evil twin. This is the eighth station, the turning of Litha, Midsummer, and the sacrificial contest between the Oak King and Holly King, between aspects of the Dying and Reborn God, celebrated in midwinter in the novel as Fogg twists and stretches time. But fortunately, a solution presents itself -- the next day, Fogg is told that his double, "Slater," was arrested in Edinburgh.

Why Edinburgh? Well, it was the home of the original "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," Deacon William Brodie, giving it a powerful aura of duplicity. Verne may have been alluding, Rosicrucian-style, to the lost Stuart heir (a Scot, of course) and the "shadow court" of his Prieur?patrons. It may be significant in this connection that (the royal) Aouda's disguise, in which she escapes from Death and Justice in India, is "of Scottish material." Verne himself was of Scots descent, and in *The Children of Captain Grant* (also, significantly, about the circumnavigation of the earth) mentions Grant's resolve to found a Scottish colony "in one of the vast continents of Oceania," thus echoing, among other things, Bacon's *New Atlantis.* But back to Fogg, released from prison on the news of Slater's arrest. When was Slater arrested in mystically significant Edinburgh? "Three days previously." That is, on the day that Fogg had purchased the *Henrietta* to burn her. His sacrifice is accepted, his doppelganger is appeased. He can travel on from Liverpool to London, through the house of Virgo, reborn young and intact.

"'What's the matter, Passepartout?'
'The matter, sir! The matter is that I've just learned a second ago . . .'
'What, then?'
'That we could have done the trip around the world in only 78 days.'
'Undoubtedly,' answered Mr Fogg, 'by not passing through India.'"
-- Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days,* Chapter XXXVII

There are 78 tarot cards; Fogg has taken 80 days to circle the world, but as Passepartout points out above, he could have taken 78. Fogg the whist-player deliberately adds two more hidden cards to the deck -- perhaps the Maiden Aouda and the [Drowned Sailor](#) from the *Mary Celeste* -- in order to "pass through India." Having been released from Judgement in Liverpool, Fogg is free to claim the last trump in the Tarot cycle, the World. The number 80 kabbalistically equals not merely *kes,* the Throne, but Yesod, the ninth sphere of the Sephiroth, the sphere of Foundation. This Working allows, essentially, root access to the interface between the material world and the world of Forms -- just the kind of thing that Verne himself was channeling for forty years.

On December 21, 1872 at 8:45 p.m. in London, all five classical planets (plus the Moon and, obviously, the Sun) are below the horizon -- on the other side of the world. No ancient eyes in the sky are watching Fogg when he arrives at the Reform Club. He has dodged the rulers of the calendar from Sun to Saturn, arriving on the extra day "gained unconsciously" (or superconsciously) by travelling around the world from west to east, against the sun. Between Verne's gaps and overlaps (the novel confuses at least four dates badly), and Fogg's sorceries, the timestream is completely tangled and twisted, its energies bunched up like water in a knotted garden hose. No wonder, for the first and only time in history, on the day before Fogg completes the Working "all the clocks in London were striking ten minutes before nine." Only Passepartout's watch, carried through three deaths without setting or alteration, shows the True Time.

"In all this the eccentric gentleman had displayed his marvellous qualities of composure and precision. But what was the point? What had he gained from all this commotion? What had he got out of his journey?"
-- Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days,* Chapter XXXVII

Fogg has lapped the decans, the zodiac, and the year of the god, shaved from the Foundation, and palmed from the Tarot. What does he gain? His Working has created, or pinched off, a free day in London, a day when MI-8 (for the sake of argument) can do anything, a day of perfect freedom of operation and total control. Perhaps this day becomes an unbreachable Refuge, or a place to store archives against temporal disruption and decay. Perhaps it is shaved out and subdivided, or invested across the worlds to bear dividends, so that every MI-8 operative is given a few minutes to spend doing anything from violating the laws of gravity to dodging bullets to pushing "restart" on an ambush or a ritual. (One day is 86,400 seconds -- that's a lot of combat rounds, even if MI-8 can't refresh them.) Or perhaps the goal is more local, merely to tie the world of 1872 firmly into the British cartographic framework and choke off the irrational Sphinxes in India and Lemurians in America alike.

World GDP in 1872 was roughly £10 billion, or $844 billion in today's money, give or take. One day's worth of that is £27.6 million, around $2.31 billion now -- pocket change as global conspiracies go, but a pretty good score if Fogg was, in fact, the thief that Fix so passionately believed him to be. Could the Fogg Working have been just a giant sorcerous caper, an *Ocean's 8* thumb in the eye to his pinchpenny Rosicrucian masters? And finally, the Working may

explain Fogg's apparent immortality -- he has retroactively made himself, as Verne put it in the first chapter, "one who might have lived a thousand years without ever growing old." Well worth it in and of itself. Jules Verne, sadly, died in 1905 at the age of 77, three years short of the miraculous 80. But perhaps all was not lost. His works would live forever, and his mastery of Rosicrucian lore may have given him one last scientific -- or alchemical -- miracle. He died on March 24, 1905, the day before the festival of the resurrected of Attis. His tomb in the Madeleine graveyard at Amiens bears a sculpture, featuring a resurrected Verne. The sculpture is entitled "Onward to immortality, and the eternal youth." Onward to the east, and the rising sun.

The Omniscient Eye

Can I Use Cyberwear to Test My Mettle?

Everyone in cyberpunk campaigns has all kinds of nifty metal limbs, digital eyes, and so on. I'm sure the abilities of a Steve Austin are cinematic, but how close could we get, theoretically? What kinds of obstacles would we have to overcome to produce cybernetic limbs and sensory equipment at least as good as "original parts," and what kinds of limitations would they still face? Are cybernetic replacements always going to be second-best, like modern artificial hearts and hearing aids, or can we build better replacements for ourselves?
--Benson Fong

We've been on the brink of a cyberware explosion for a while; pacemakers, mechanical hearts[1], and cochlear implants[2] certainly qualify as early examples. The good news for our intrepid questioner is that science has made some incredible leaps in neural interfaces recently. The term cybernetics comes from the Greek kybernetes, meaning steersman; it is the science of systems of information and control[3], which is the central problem in creating bionics (electronics which mimic biology) and cyborgs (cybernetic organisms). The crucial component of a bionic arm isn't the mechanical muscles, but the BCI (brain-computer interface) that allows fine motor control of them; keeping a heart pumping and blood flowing is very simple by comparison. Implants that allow a quadriplegic to play Pong and draw crude circles[4], robot hands controlled by the interpretation of fMRI scans[5], and devices that allow blind people to see with their tongues[6] are all being tested. This doesn't mean that Steven Austin is around the corner; there are still many hurdles in the way of human cybernetic enhancement.

The first set of problems is technological. Many bionic systems will require a source of electrical energy. As any laptop owner can tell you, our current battery technology is both heavy and short-lived, and drawing power from the body somehow is likely to be unhealthy. The processing power necessary to interpret neural activity is also going to produce a fair amount of waste heat. Until those limits are surpassed (which may come soon, thanks to nanotech supercapacitors[7]), implants are going to be an annoying combination of heavy, hot, and needing frequent recharge or external battery packs. Systems without mechanical components will be somewhat less prone to this problem, but not immune.

There's also the concern of component failure; it's enough of a pain to replace a CPU when you don't need exploratory surgery to reach it. Components will need to capable of performing for years without replacement, in a very harsh environment; this will certainly drive the cost up quite a bit.

Human senses currently outstrip the resolutions available for consumer electronics. As cybernetic replacements become more commonplace, this is likely to change, with the exception of the sense of touch. Touch registers several types of information over a comparatively wide area. Without advanced nanotech, it may not be possible to lay down enough sensors to gather the same amount of information. This failing, however, is made up by the ability to add entirely different sensory capabilities tied to the normal ones; infrared vision and ultrasonic hearing are possible, if not very probable. While it would be fairly easy to shift a sense to a different spectrum, expanding the spectrum it spans (i.e. both infravision and normal vision simultaneously) may not be possible without losing resolution, and switching between modes may be disorienting.

The second set of problems is medical. Colorful fiction aside, the gleaming cybernetic port is a bad idea. Most parts will likely be made of hypoallergenic space-age polymers, not metal; reducing the weight and risk of heavy-metal poisoning is worth the extra cost. This is one of the major advantages of medical implants. Unlike transplanted organs, there is little risk of rejection. They also don't have the complex collection and storage problems that organ transplants

do. This could provide the technological basis for less-necessary treatments. Not all parts will be biocompatible, however. Injuries to the area of the implant may damage shielding of those parts, complicating treatment[8].

But the major danger of most injuries is not the trauma itself, but the potential for sepsis. A datajack or cyberarm stud is effectively an open wound, and thus a dangerous source of infection. Keeping the datajack under the skin solves the problem. Data and power can be transmitted electromagnetically through skin without apparent side effects. Convincing skin to grow over a mechanical socket that can mount a limb would be harder, and might cause grooming and mild odor problems similar to earrings or other body piercings. Installing almost any cyberware will require major surgery, with the attendant risk of infection.

The current state-of-the-art neural interface also takes a while to adapt to. Not only does the user have to learn how to use the implant, but the computer system must also learn how to read and interpret the user's neural patterns. It's not an impossible process, but it has taken Richard Nagle (a quadriplegic testing the new BrainGate[9] system) four months to control a single cursor with the agility of a normal computer user. More complex systems are likely to take even longer. Without incredible improvements in neuroscience, there is no easy way to avoid the learning curve, though training and physical therapy will make it easier. Improvements in the interface or the systems using it may reduce the time for the system to adapt to the user, though.

Certain types of cyberware are medically quite cinematic. The neural encoding involved in skills and mental traits is likely much more complex (and widely distributed) than that for motor control and sensory input. Combined with the learning curve for using a bionic component, that probably rules out skill chips or all but the crudest personality modifiers. And even with space age polymers and fantastically powerful motors, cyberlimbs are still anchored to flesh and bone. Push too hard, and if the bionics don't break the biological bits will. This could be alleviated, but doing so would require yet wider changes.

However, the last and hardest set of problems is social. Doctors in most civilized countries are bound by the Hippocratic Oath[10], and though it doesn't actually say "first, do no harm," it does heavily imply it. The ethical implications of cosmetic surgery are nothing compared to the quandary behind replacing a functional organ with a mechanical one, even one that would be an improvement. Large bionic components will likely be mostly prosthetic limbs and replacement organs. Even the datajack will be a tough sell, because installing it would require dangerous neurosurgery.

Even if there are doctors willing to do the work, the question of who finances it comes in. The components won't be cheap, and neither will the surgery, and insurance doesn't like to cover elective surgery. The rich might buy enhancements for themselves, but probably to improve their job or social standing; internal cell-phone/organizers and voice-box improvements are much more likely candidates than claws. There's little bionics could provide that couldn't be gotten (much) cheaper as an external gadget, which is also easier to upgrade or take back from an employee. The chief benefits of most elective cyberware would be constant availability and the potential for secrecy; for either, the recipient or their benefactor will be paying through the nose.

DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) has floated ideas for cybernetic animals, everything from butterflies[11] to sharks[12]. The ideas have been sneered at as flights of fancy, and with good reason given the often ludicrous past attempts to bring animals into the modern battlefield. However, these proposals use the animals as spy agents rather than combatants, using electrical remote control systems similar to ones that have already been demonstrated, albeit imperfectly, on cockroaches[13]. Once the control systems are perfected, more innovative (and aggressive) uses can and probably will be found.

The legal, social, and ethical constraints are a lot simpler when animals are used. Rats and monkeys already bear the major brunt of experimental research into treatments for human ailments. Some fully developed technology will also be easier to use on animals than humans: making soldiers into literal killing machines would not help the military's image, but turning animals into combatants or spies has the potential to reduce the (human) body count. Using biological components grown from animal parts, such as the disembodied rat brain that can control a flight simulator, is a lot less likely to draw the modern equivalent of villagers with pitchforks and torches than using human parts.

However, given the right circumstances, much is possible in the next 20 years. For the most part, bionic enhancement will be for medical reasons, or to animals. If we manage to fully crack the way our brains encode and use data, BCIs might deliver the promise of fast-as-thought computing and fully functional cyberlimbs (or the terror of brain hacking). If we can improve the energy density of batteries and reduce waste heat from ICs, cyberware might become sleek and unobtrusive. If social mores change (the least likely, at least in the short term), the well-to-do might buy bionic enhancements the way they now buy plastic surgery. And if somewhere in there, very rich men find a good reason to give a spy some hard-to-detect surveillance equipment and/or weapons, well . . . that's what real super-human cyborgs will probably made of.

[1]"Montreal Surgeons Implant New Mechanical Heart" -- Science Daily, October 2005

[2]"Cochlear Implants" -- National Institute on Deafness and Other Communicative Disorders

[3]Cybernetics -- Wikipedia

[4]"Mind Control" -- Wired Magazine, March 2005

[5]"RobotHand Controlled by Thought Alone" -- New Scientist Tech, May 2006

[6]"The Seeing Tongue" -- Science News Online, September 2001

[7]"MIT research may spell end for the battery" -- The Boston Globe, June 2006

[8]"April Fools? Another two months of magnetic implants" -- BMEZine, April 2006

[9]Cyberkinetics BrainGate Neural Interface System

[10]"The Hippocratic Oath -- Modern Version", orig. by Louis Lasagna, Academic Dean of the School of Medicine at Tufts University, 1964

[11]"Pentagon plans cyber-insect army" -- BBC News, March 2006

[12]"US plans stealth shark spies" -- BBC News, March 2006

[13]"It crawls! It scampers! It -- almost -- turns right! It's Robo-roach!" -- August Chronicle Online, January 1997

--Nathaniel Eliot

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 Interview

Chris Pramas of Green Ronin Publishing

by Steven Marsh

Founded in 2000 as part of the first wave of **d20 System** publishers, Green Ronin Publishing has grown to become one of the foremost voices of the RPG world. From the super-heroic **Mutants & Masterminds** to the romantic-fantasy **Blue Rose RPG** to the darkly Lovecraftian fantasy-pirate world of **Freeport,** Green Ronin has touched many different genres and styles while maintaining a core focus and flavor that's made them the ENnie Award winner for Best Publisher for the past three years. The founder of Green Ronin, Chris Pramas, sat down with us to answer a few questions about the company's recent history, what's in the works, and where they see themselves in a few years.

Golden Age

* * *

Pyramid: **For those who have been out of the loop about Green Ronin's goings on for the past few years, can you give us the dime-tour history about recent events?**

Chris Pramas: These last couple of years have been a time of extremes: very high highs and very low lows. On the high side, our launch of **Mutants & Masterminds 2nd Edition** has been wildly successful, both financially and critically. We also broke some new ground with the **Blue Rose RPG** and followed that up with **True20 Adventure Roleplaying.** We just got back from GenCon, where we won the ENnie Award for Best Publisher for the third year in a row and **Mutants & Masterminds 2nd Edition** won for Best Game.

A couple of years back we also became the exclusive RPG design house for Games Workshop. We put together a new edition of the classic **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay** and have supported that with a series of supplements. Right now I'm designing a **Warhammer 40,000 RPG** for release next year. All this material is published by Black Industries, which is part of Games Workshop's publishing wing, BL Publishing.

On the low side, our key business partner for over three years ripped us off for a big pile of money. Osseum, the company in question, handled our sales and order fulfillment for a long time and for most of that time we had a great relationship and they paid us on time every month. When the RPG market took a downturn in 2003, they lost some of their clients and saw the sales of those remaining decline. Rather than admit that their business model was failing, they started taking money generated by the sales of their clients and using it to keep their business afloat. At first it just seemed like a short term problem with distributor non-payment, which was all too easy to believe. After a few months though, it became clear that the problem was much worse. Then after a lot of empty promises, the owner of Osseum ditched his Seattle apartment in mid-month and fled the state. He hasn't been seen since. We were never paid for months' worth of sales, including those of big, expensive projects like the **Black Company Campaign Setting,** the **Advanced Bestiary,** and the **Egyptian Adventures: Hamunaptra** boxed set. This was a huge blow for a company our size and we came close to going out of business. Thankfully, we had an alternate revenue stream coming in from the **Warhammer** books that helped us get through the worst of it. Staffers also agreed to take a pay cut to help pay down the debt. Since then it's been a slow but steady recovery, as we try to clean up the huge mess Osseum left us with.

Pyramid: **To back up a bit and make sure I understand things here: Osseum served as your order-fulfillment house; now, was that an exclusive arrangement, and if so, how much? Did Alliance stock Green Ronin's products by ordering through Osseum? How did this arrangement differ from shelving arrangements akin to those some distributors have with other publishers?**

Chris: Osseum was what's called a fulfillment house or a "distributor for distributors." Basically, they took on publisher clients and warehoused and sold their books into the hobby and the book trade. Their clients didn't have to set up their own warehouses or deal with shipping. Since Osseum handled sales and collection, they also didn't need to

have dedicated sales staff. All these various services were paid for by a percentage of the sales. Osseum was supposed to -- and for many years did -- collect the money, take their cut, and pass on the rest to their clients. The idea was to let the publishers concentrate on creating the games and let Osseum solicit and sell them.

Distributors also appreciated the set up because they could make one call and order products from a whole bunch of publishers. So back in say 2003, Alliance could make one order from Osseum and get stocked up on Green Ronin, Bad Axe, Mystic Eye, Bastion, and others.

Pyramid: **What was the impetus for moving to an exclusive relationship with Osseum in the first place? Was it market conditions, a desire to avoid the expense of warehouse and shipping, or something else? At the time it struck me that the Osseum arrangement was fairly rare, in that I don't recall any other pretty-big names within the industry utilizing fulfillment houses.**

Chris: Well, you have to remember that when Green Ronin started we were a really small operation. It was just Nicole and I doing it part time and Hal (who later became a partner) was handling graphic design freelance for us at first. In the early days we needed a fulfillment house if we wanted to be able to launch the company. We simply didn't have the time and resources to take on sales and fulfillment ourselves. I was still working at Wizards of the Coast at the time and Nicole was the General Manager of Cheapass Games.

We started with a different fulfillment house though, Wizard's Attic. They are the ones who originally made the concept work, at least for a while. Wizard's Attic began to grow just as the *d20 System* boom was taking off and they tried to do too much too fast. When we first signed up with Wizard's Attic, they had maybe 20 clients. When we left them for Osseum, they had over 80. After we left, Wizard's Attic had its own meltdown and a bunch of people got burned. We considered ourselves lucky to have gotten out when we did.

As to why we switched to Osseum, there were two primary reasons. First, they had fewer clients than Wizard's Attic so we felt we'd get more attention. Second -- and this was the deal clincher -- they offered access to the book trade and we wanted to crack that market. Adam and Jim from Osseum had experience selling into the book trade for Wizards of the Coast and TSR and, indeed, they were as good as their word and got into stores like Barnes & Noble, Borders, Waldenbooks, and so on.

Pyramid: **What's Green Ronin doing now in the post-Osseum era regarding fulfillment? Have you taken up order fulfillment yourselves or is there someone else behind the scenes now? (And, if the latter, I trust you're watching them like a hawk?)**

Chris: When it became clear that Osseum was on its way out, offers started rolling in. We were courted by several other fulfillment houses, and did consider them. Having watched both Wizard's Attic and Osseum go down in flames though, we just thought it would be tempting fate to trust our future to another set up like that. In the end we took three steps. First, we took over sales and collection ourselves, so now the money comes directly to us. This also meant hiring a dedicated sales person. Second, we made an arrangement with Alliance. They now warehouse our stock and handle our shipping. We also have what's known as a flooring arrangement with them, which basically means they don't pay for books until they sell but since they have all our product our titles are always in stock. Lastly, we made a deal with Alliance's sister company, Diamond Book Distribution, to handle our book trade business.

Pyramid: **Okay; thanks for clarifying that for me. Leaving the business side of things . . .** *Mutants & Masterminds* **has been one of the break-out hits of the** *d20 System* **era. Do you have any thoughts or insights as to the game's success? Is it because** *d20 System* **fans have been hungry for Supers, because supers fans haven't been getting what they want from established options, the setting, something else . . .?**

Chris: I think the real root of *Mutants & Masterminds'* success is that it appealed to gamers beyond the *d20 System* core. When we first conceived it, it was really meant for the *d20 System* audience. Early on the design, Steve Kenson asked me how it important it was to cleave to the standard rules. I told him that the most important thing was to emulate the superhero genre, so he should feel free to make any required changes to better do that. While other *d20 System* supers games tried to keep things like classes and hit points, Steve did away with those and built something more suitable for superheroes. Still, because of our reputation as a *d20 System* company and the game's use of the

OGL, I didn't expect it to break out of that mold as successfully as it did. Almost as soon as it release though, we started getting e-mails from folks saying, "I just ditched my 10-year supers campaign to run *Mutants & Masterminds*." It was then I knew we really had something.

Pyramid: **Green Ronin was a part of the *d20 System* era from Day One. With the benefit of hindsight, do you have any thoughts or reflections about the *d20 System*? Has it been good or bad for the industry, good or bad for Green Ronin, good or bad for gamers, and so on?**

Chris: It was certainly good for Green Ronin. It allowed us to go from a part-time venture to a full-time company with a salaried staff in just a couple of years. It was also good for gamers, who were spoiled for choice for a few years with so much stuff coming out. All three tiers of the game industry saw some benefit as a lot of money flowed through the system. On the downside, so much stuff started coming out that it became hard to keep track of it all. During the boom time, distributors and retailers would order just about anything with a *d20 System* logo. Unfortunately, this led a lot of them to sink money into inventory that was never going to move and the release of the *Dungeons & Dragons 3.5 Edition* just made that worse (as few people wanted the *3.0* books after that). When you go into game stores today you can still see huge piles of the stuff sitting there and that makes it harder to sell retailers on new *d20 System* material, no matter its quality. Now where there used to be dozens of *d20 System* companies, only a handful are still doing products in the print arena.

Pyramid: **I've always been a big fan of boxed sets, admittedly viewed with the rosy glasses of nostalgia. As such, I was pleased to learn that Green Ronin was making a return to that form with *Egyptian Adventures: Hamunaptra*. I know *Hamunaptra's* fate was tied up with Osseum, but were you able to gain any insight into how well it was received by fans? Do you think the boxed set form helped or hurt its reception? Does Green Ronin have any other boxed sets planned?**

Chris: What we discovered is that it sold no better or worse than a hardback book, but it took more work to put together. It's really too bad, as I love boxed sets. There are certain things they can do that a book cannot. For example, I love that you can have a separate players' book in the box that you can just hand out to your group without worrying that they'll see something they shouldn't. It's also easier to include things like poster maps. Unfortunately, our experience is that boxed sets aren't worth the extra effort, so it's unlikely we'll do more.

Pyramid: **Oh, well; another dream shattered. Moving on . . . It seems like much of Green Ronin's efforts of late have been to try to make a name for itself beyond the *d20 System*, with the *True20 System, Blue Rose, Mutants & Masterminds,* and so on. I'm assuming this is a deliberate plan; do you have any comments about this strategy?**

Chris: Yes, it is quite deliberate and it's something we're pursuing for several reasons. First, we like to optimize our rules for the genre and audience. I mentioned this previously when talking about *Mutants & Masterminds,* but the same goes for things like *Blue Rose* and the upcoming *Dragon Fist.* Second, we like publishing our own core rulebooks, as these are always the best-selling products in a game line. When the *d20 System* was at its height, it was worth it to let Wizards of the Coast have the core book sales for that game, but these days it's much better for us to do our own. Lastly, doing core rulebooks like *Mutants & Masterminds* and *True20 Adventure Roleplaying* insulates us from whatever might happen with *Dungeons & Dragons Fourth Edition* and the OGL. This was one of the valuable lessons of *Dungeons & Dragons 3.5.* That hurt our *d20 System* sales, but didn't affect *Mutants & Masterminds* at all.

Pyramid: **In a somewhat realistic ideal world, where do you all see yourselves in a few years?**

Chris: I would expect Green Ronin to have two or three RPG game lines that it supports regularly, and we'll probably also try other short arc games like *Blue Rose* (which was conceived and executed as a three-book line). If I have my way, we'll also expand beyond RPGs. As a gamer, I've never limited myself to just RPGs. I love boardgames, miniatures games, card games, and so on I'd like to see Green Ronin reflect this. We've already dabbled a bit with the *Torches & Pitchforks* card game, but I'd like to do a lot more.

Pyramid: **Although *d20 System* "support" (adventures, supplements, and the like) hasn't played as large a part in the past couple of years for Green Ronin, it's still a portion of Green Ronin's catalog. Given the number of *d20 System* publishers out there, how has Green Ronin tried to set itself apart? Do you have a guiding**

philosophy behind what *d20 System* products you develop?

Chris: From the get-go, our philosophy was to set ourselves apart by focusing on quality material. We tried to provide the total package: solid rules, engaging writing, great art and maps, and a lot of game utility. We also haven't been afraid to go beyond the boundaries of traditional *Dungeons & Dragons,* in both setting and rules.

Pyramid: Which part of the *d20 System* audience are hoping to reach out to?

Beyond the Towers

Chris: We're targeting what I'd call the modern gamer. There's a portion of the *Dungeons & Dragons* audience that is interested in a nostalgia experience. They may like the current rules, but they are most interested in material that's similar in feel to old *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons First Edition* modules. That is not our audience. Those folks are well-served by companies like Necromancer, Goodman, and Troll Lord. The gamers we target are those who either have "been there and done that" or who are primarily fans of the new edition. It's for them that we created our new Bleeding Edge line of adventures, which kicked off this summer with *Mansion of Shadows* and continues soon with *Beyond the Towers.* We think there are enough gamers who want something different than a nostalgia experience to keep the line going. We'll see if we are right!

Pyramid: **I don't know if you can sum up in a few sentences, but what is it about the Bleeding Edge adventures that you feel sets them apart, or makes them appeal to this "been there/done that" audience? Are they similarly themed to the original *Freeport* trilogy, or branching out into different territory?**

Chris: They certainly share some common elements with the *Freeport* adventures, but we tried to make them even easier to drop into any given *Dungeons & Dragons* setting. Our goals with the series are not grandiose. We are not trying to redefine how RPG adventures are designed or suchlike. What we are trying to offer the modern gamer is first and foremost a good story. We are also trying to provide a balance of roleplaying, combat, and problem-solving encounters. Lastly, we are trying to use the *d20 System* rules to their utmost. There's a lot of great *d20 System* material that isn't being used and we are going to be showcasing some of it in the Bleeding Edge adventures.

All that said there isn't one template for a Bleeding Edge adventure. *Mansion of Shadows* is heavy on investigation and roleplaying, for example, while *Beyond the Towers* is more of a wilderness exploration adventure. As the series goes on we'll surely cover the full range of fantasy adventure types, but always with our original goals in mind.

Pyramid: **Shifting back to the business side again . . . Green Ronin has been pretty upfront about its efforts at recovering in the wake of the Osseum affair. How have Green Ronin's plans been altered in light of that setback? Are you all doing anything special or unusual to recover?**

Chris: At first we didn't talk about the extent of the damage, actually. Sometimes when there's blood in the water, others will seek to take advantage of your perceived weakness and we wanted to avoid that. It was only when we were through the worst of it and things had stabilized a bit that we started being more forthcoming. Our plans have had to change in many ways, from product development and scheduling to pay rates and marketing plans. The biggest change, and one which is hopefully only temporary, is that we haven't had the money to take big chances. Back in 2002, for example, *Mutants & Masterminds* was a huge gamble but we had the resources to roll the dice. At the moment we have to concentrate on our core business until we finish paying down our debts. This means that our sales are easier to predict but it also means we are less likely to have a breakout hit like we had with *Mutants & Masterminds.* I'd like to get us back to a place where we can take some risks.

For the time being though getting out of the red is our primary concern for obvious reasons. We've been making steady progress at this for the past 18 months and thankfully most of our freelancers have been really understanding about our situation. Still, I felt it was taking too long to pay some of them off, so this summer we started a Freelancer Fundraiser. The idea was to raise extra money that could go to paying off people who had already been extremely patient. We ran some product sales on our website in July and August, which isn't all that unusual. What we did differently this time

was to announce two special books (one for *Mutants & Masterminds* and one for our Bleeding Edge *d20 System* line) that we're going to do in 2007. The idea is that people can pre-order them now and that'll give us some money that's not tied to a specific project in the short term. Then next year we'll publish those books and the only way you'll be able to get them is via the Freelancer Fundraiser. So our fans get a chance to help us out but they also get a cool collectible in return. Since we aren't doing the books until next year, they also get a chance to voice their opinion on what they'd like to see. We're getting feedback from people who've pre-ordered the books, so they can have some impact on their final form.

Pyramid: **So, if I'm understanding it right, the only way you'll be able to get these two projects is by pre-ordering them now, right? How successful have you been in getting the word out to your audience about these products, and what has the pre-reception buzz been? I ask because -- from the publishing side -- it's hard to get the numbers to work out for any limited-release product, so I'm curious how receptive the fans have been so far.**

Chris: Yes, you'll only be able to get them by pre-ordering. We've primarily gotten the word out through our own websites and the various RPG news sites. The fan response to the Freelance Fundraiser has been gratifying and we've gotten many orders for the limited edition books. Still, some folks seem put off because they don't know exactly what they are ordering. Therefore I've decided that we're going to nail that down in September and announce the results. Then we'll keep orders open until the end of the year. That'll give people on the fence a chance to hear about what their going to get. At year's end we'll know what we need to put together and how many we'll need to produce.

Pyramid: **GenCon was just a couple of weeks ago. For those of us who weren't there, was there anything nifty, new, or exciting released or announced at that event?**

Chris: We debuted several new books at the show, most of which are also in stores now. We just released *Golden Age,* our first real genre book for *Mutants & Masterminds; True20 Worlds of Adventure,* which presents five new mini settings for *True20 Adventure Roleplay;* and *Crisis in Freeport,* a *d20 System* adventure that wraps up the story we began in 2000 with *Death in Freeport* and sets the stage for Freeport's next iteration. We also had a limited number of the next *Mutants & Masterminds book, Ultimate Power.* Those sold out by Friday at noon at the show and the rest are on their way from China. *Ultimate Power* should be in stores later in September.

Golden Age

Pyramid: **What's on the horizon for Green Ronin? Any big new items to look forward to, or any other "secrets" that we can convince you to reveal here?**

Chris: In the near future we have several cool products coming out. First there's the *Deck of Many Things,* which should be going to print shortly. This brings the famous artifact to life in a set of beautifully illustrated tarot-sized cards. We're also doing a *Thieves' World Gift Set* in October. This slip case collects all four of our *Thieves' World* books and also includes a brand new adventure set in the classic era. This will let people get the whole line and the new adventure in one shot for only $100.

Early next year we are doing an introductory product for *Mutants & Masterminds,* the *Mutants & Masterminds Beginner's Guide. Mutants & Masterminds* is already our best selling line and we want to bring even more gamers and comics fans into the fold. This comes out in February, which also happens to be when New York Comic Con takes place. I can reveal here for the first time that Green Ronin will be attending New York Comic Con and we'll be debuting the *Mutants & Masterminds Beginner's* Guide there.

Pyramid: **(Oh, great; and I just moved away from the East Coast . . .)**

Chris: For those folks in the Bay Area, I'm going to be a special guest at EndGame Oakland's Five Year Anniversary Party on September 30. As part of the day's activities, I'll be sitting in on a session of *True20 Adventure Roleplaying.* Five seats for the game are being raffled off, with all proceeds going to charity. Folks can buy raffle tickets at

EndGame for $2 each and drawings will be made that day. For more info, go to http://www.endgameoakland.com.

Pyramid: **Big news, all; I'm especially looking forward to that Deck of Many Things. (I paid handsomely for a copy of the old Dragon Magazine which had a cardboard replica of that item.) Thanks for your time, and I look forward to future happenings in Freeport, Freedom City, and points beyond.**

Pyramid Review

Sword & Skull

Published by Avalon Hill

Game design by Mike Elliott

Game board, rules booklet, 10 color coded figurines, 2 Dice, 80 Plastic gold pieces, and 110 cards; 2-5 players, boxed, $40.00

The greatest ship in the royal navy, *H.M.S. Sea Hammer,* has been stolen by the powerful figure known as the Pirate King. Now it is up to a few brave officers to try and retrieve this prize, through might or wealth. Each officer has control of a conscripted pirate from the dungeons, in case -- as the game text says -- "it might take a thief to catch a thief." Will might or gold win the ship back for the Queen?

In each turn of *Sword & Skull* players will roll a pair of unusual six-siders to determine how far their pieces must move. On a typical roll, the movement is equal to the sum of the die faces and the player may move either their pirate or their officer that number of spaces in a clockwise direction. On a roll of doubles, the player must move *both* his pirate and officer the number of spaces shown. And these dice have a blank side as well. If both die come up blank, the player may move either his officer or his pirate to any space on the outer board.

The game board of *Sword & Skull* represents the mysterious island where the Pirate King has his lair. The spaces on the outer board represent various colonized locales on the island where the player may gather gold, items, or followers. The inner board represents the volcanic path that leads to the Pirate King's secret hide-a-way where presumably he has secreted away the *Sea Hammer.* A player may enter the inner board through a cave space, and then fight his way to the Pirate King. The Pirate King will sell you back the *H.M.S. Sea Hammer* for a price that varies with the number of players. Alternatively you may fight and kill him to recover the ship. The first player to recover the ship is the winner.

Players may choose to build up the might of their characters. Officer's strength is represented as cutlass icons. Pirate's strength is shown as pistol icons. The fastest way to build strength is to gather followers and items. There are several locations around the outer board where players may pick up these followers. As players land on these spaces they get to look through the followers there and recruit the choicest characters first, so it is in every player's interest to rush to gather the most powerful recruits as quickly as possible.

One strange mechanic in the game involves the aforementioned recruits. Some recruits have pistol icons, others swords, and the rest have a number of gold coins. If you recruit a character to join you who has these coins on his card, then each time a subsequent player lands on that space he has to pay you that number of gold coins.

Players will encounter enemy cards or collect fortune cards as they traverse the board in their quest to build their strength. Defeating enemies will reward a player, and the fortune cards can have effects on combat, movement, or other aspects of play. There is also a series of "treasure chest" spots around the board that let players scoop up the gold on that spot or add gold from the bank to the other treasure chests. This mechanic certainly encourages travel around the board.

Players will need to decide whether they want to build up their pirates, their officers, or their cash reserves. The money a player collects is available to both the pirate and the officer should either of them make it to the Pirate King's lair.

The more people that play, the more likely it is that combat will be the easiest way to win, since the Pirate King asks more for the ship if there are more people hunting for her. You can't win by killing all the other players, which seems

to be at odds with the Pirate theme. In fact, the worst you can do to your fellow players is robbing them of their gold and followers. Even the Pirate King won't kill players, but merely ushers them out of his lair so they can build their strength and funds and try again. (Perhaps he's hoping they will choose to pay him the gold . . .)

Does some of this sound familiar? Paying money to players for landing on a space? An outer board, an inner board, and a final confrontation in the center? Throughout play we couldn't help but repeatedly compare this game to a strange amalgam of *Talisman* and *Monopoly.* While the similarities in game mechanics are not trivial, *Sword & Skull* is its own game. The pirate motif is firmly etched in every aspect of game play; you only get to play officers or pirates, and there is technically no rent.

From a purely metaphorical perspective, it's easy to understand how pirate recruits empower the pirate and naval recruits empower the officer. However, It never seemed all that logical why having a particular recruit in one's employ would cause another player to pay when he stops by that fellow's hometown. There are ample ways to generate income in the game besides this awkward tool.

Sword & Skull is a fun game. It is also a fast game, with a typical running time of about an hour. It is part of Avalon Hill's recent line of boxed games which include *Betrayal at House on the Hill, Nexus Ops,* and the re-releases of *RoboRally* and *Monsters Menace America.* It has the same high-quality artwork and construction of these games, but lacks the complexity. The game is designed for players age 10 and up, and its simplicity and lack of lethality make it a good candidate for a family game.

While this offering may not meet all expectations as a pirate game -- since there was no grog, no killing, no ship-to-ship combat, and no cannons -- but, as a fun game you can play with younger relatives, it's a treasure.

--Blake Smith

Pyramid Review

Spawn of Azathoth: Herald of the End of Time (for Call of Cthulhu)

Published by [Chaosium, Inc.](#)

Written by Keith Herber with Sandy Petersen, Lynn Willis, David Conyers, Don Coatar, Jeff Carey, & Steve Hatherley

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Cartography by David Conyers & Carolyn Schulz

200-page perfect bound black and white book; $23.95

Spawn of Azathoth: Herald of the End of Time is two decades old and is one of *[Call of Cthulhu's](#)* forgotten campaigns. Originally published in 1986 in the same boxed set format as *Masks of Nyarlathotep,* it has never been republished until now. Another world-spanning campaign, it is on a far less grander scale, taking the investigators from New England to Asia and the top of the world with a detour through the Dreamlands along the way.

Like the earlier *[Shadows of Yog-Sothoth](#)* this is not a straight reprint. Similarly, unlike the second edition of *Shadows of Yog-Sothoth,* this second edition of *Spawn of Azathoth* is not a lame and barely executed attempt to fix the perceived problems of a regarded classic. Indeed, no real attempt has been made to fix this campaign's problems, of which there are relatively few. Rather, this is the original campaign with extra support material, some new, some culled from other *Call of Cthulhu* supplements. Then again, *Spawn of Azathoth* was never regarded as a classic.

As the title suggests, the threat faced in *Spawn of Azathoth: Herald of the End of Time* is not the blind idiot god himself, but rather an offshoot spun off millennia ago and caught by our Sun's gravitational pull. This is "Nemesis," which itself throws comet-like shards into our Solar System. Should one fall to planet, it melts into the interior to grow and split the planet open when it spawns. To date both the Mi-go and the servant of an ancient wizard have protected the Earth, but the wizard's true plans for the Earth are just as much a danger to humanity. If they come to fruition, the world will be protected, but all forward progress will be frozen.

Described as a campaign of moderate length, it is divided into six parts, beginning in H.P. Lovecraft's own Providence, Rhode Island, and ending in Tibet. Between these bookends, the campaign takes the investigators to Garrison, Montana, St. Augustine, Florida, the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal, and into the Dreamlands twice. These four parts can be played in any order, but it is probably best to run them in this order, with the Dreamlands scenarios run at any time between or even over the course of the campaign. Not a campaign for the inexperienced, four to six investigators are required who must have either already visited the Dreamlands, or meet the minimum Sanity requirements.

Spawn of Azathoth begins in one of the character's bedroom. He is awoken by a horrifying apparition. The realization that it is of his university history tutor, Doctor Philip Baxter, is confirmed by a death notice the following day. Attending the funeral, the investigators are introduced to the doctor's family and colleagues, many of whom will figure in forthcoming events and also invited to the reading of the will. The character that saw the apparition is bequeathed a packet of documents, including a journal. Annotated by the deceased's brother, it details a series of dreams, during one

of which, Baxter describes seeing his former student.

Armed with the details gleaned from the journal, the coincidental nature of the apparition, and an inherent curiosity, the investigators begin looking into the life and death of Philip Baxter. The clues in this twisted murder mystery reveal not only his untimely death, but links to a privately funded venture in Montana, his children, and the Dreamlands. In Montana, Baxter has helped build an observatory to locate a mysterious stellar body. Staffed by expatriate Russian scientists, at first nothing seems amiss, but exploring away from the facility reveals a "ghostly" presence, a non-Mythos though still outré presence, and a malignly mortal presence of astronomical origins. Apart from the finale, this is probably the campaign's deadliest encounter, and is all too easy to blunder into.

The fates of Baxter's children send the investigators to Florida and the Andaman Islands. After informing Baxter's son Colin of his death, they can join him in diving on a Spanish treasure ship. When Colin is arrested for the murder of a local priest, the party's attempts to clear him end up exposing a predatory cult. This leads to an entertaining scene in which the characters, having been tied up by the cult, are witnesses to the cult's demise at the hands of a local Ghoul pack. (Well . . . entertaining for the Keeper that is.) Visiting Baxter's daughter Cynthia brings the characters to the British Crown penal colony, where they learn of her kidnapping by the inhabitants of another island. Rescuing the medical missionary is no easy task as she has definitely gone more than native.

Although these earthbound scenarios reveal a little of the threat they face, much of the truth can only be learned in the Dreamlands, especially Doctor Baxter's fate. In the first scenario, their researches are hindered by the fickleness of Ulthar's libraries, but eventually answers are available from an Outer God. The second scenario is a little different. Imbibing a strange concoction sent from New Orleans via a certain author's aunts, each investigator falls into a deep sleep and enters the Dreamlands, and those investigators who do not partake are physically pulled into the Dreamlands by Ghouls! (This raises a question: If this method is available at this point, why not make it available earlier and bypass the Sanity requirements to enter the Dreamlands?) Once there they find themselves accompanying the Ghouls to rescue their princess. Again there are answers to be gained, but this chapter, unfortunately entitled "The Eternal Quest," is something of a linear slog to get through.

Finally a telegram requests the investigators meet one of Baxter's colleagues in Tibet. Finding him in Lhasa, they trek across the Tibetan plateau to a remote valley where they can put an end to the threat. Along the way the investigators must face encounters natural and unnatural, plus being dogged by Communist forces. The final encounter is as deadly as you would expect and is designed to be tailored to feel of the campaign being run by the Keeper, but there is little help towards that end.

Physically, *Spawn of Azathoth* continues the disappointing trend in Chaosium's releases of late. It is not as bad as some; many of the irritating ticks and quirks that so irked with the supposed *Sixth Edition* of the rules having been long dropped. None of the artwork is as crisp as it should be, some of it being quite poorly handled; worse, every single map appears grubby and slightly out of focus.

Where Chaosium is to be applauded is in the efforts made to provide support and background material for the campaign. Absent in the 1986 original, these add detail on the locations within the campaign -- Providence, Montana, and British India in particular. Information on diving is taken from *Fearful Passages* and the description of Colin's salvage vessel has been adapted from *Beyond the Mountains of Madness.* As with the reprint of *Shadows of Yog-Sothoth,* tables have been added that neatly summarize the clues and connections between the chapters. There is some Keeper advice, but it only goes to when events should be run, not how.

What this *Second Edition* does *not* do is address any problems with the campaign itself. It starts off well in a pulp style, but as a whole *Spawn of Azathoth* is an uneven affair. Part of the problem is that the trips to Florida and the Andaman Islands have relatively little bearing upon the campaign as a whole, almost serving as something for the investigators to do until they get to the Dreamlands. This is due to the fact that the middle parts of the campaign can be run in any order, thus moving it away from the classic onionskin format and denying it a more linear structure that might have given it more direction. Of course, this move also enables the campaign's events to be more player driven.

Further, when you get down to the actual scenarios, these have not been touched. This shows worst of all in the Florida chapter where one location is left hanging for a lack of clues despite it being related to the mystery, while

another location -- an undersea set of ruins -- has no relevance whatsoever. It is up to the Keeper to decide the point and purpose of these ruins. And when the investigators do enter the Dreamlands, it feels too much of a slog to get the desired information, especially in "The Eternal Quest."

Given the uneven structure of the campaign, Spawn of Azathoth is best run by an experienced Keeper for experienced investigators. Certainly, both should enjoy the chapters set in Providence and Florida -- they are the campaign's highlight -- but player and Keeper alike will need to work harder to enjoy the rest. The Keeper is helped in this endeavor with all of the new support material, but this is not an easy campaign. Nevertheless and despite showing its age, this reprint of *Spawn of Azathoth: Herald of the End of Time* is not unwelcome if not a classic.

--Matthew Pook

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

The Call To Adventure Can Be Faint (Part I)

Hey, GMs, here's an interesting challenge: What's the barest thread you can hang an adventure motivation on?

Now, I realize that, in some campaigns, the answer is "None"; there is no lesser motivation that is required than the mere existence of the adventure. Really, a dropped postcard outside of a tavern saying, "Come to Ye Monstrous Dungeon! Take the Plottepointe Pass to Exit 7, then ride 6.2 miles. 'Tis on thy left!" is all that's really necessary. But for campaigns with even a modicum of roleplaying, motivation of some sort is easy.

Now, most gamerly movies tend to open with ample motivation: Death of a loved one, destruction of cities, proof positive that Armageddon is A'Comin' real quick-like. But the problem with this level of motivation is that it's hard to maintain; really, even the most prolific lineage will run out of relatives to knock off before the beginning of adventures, and playing one-upsmanship with motivations gets the jumpers lined up with that shark in no time.

Still other adventures come from Fiat Central, in the form of orders from the King/Starfleet/The President. While these are great for a good many adventures, they do show their threads pretty early; when you're constantly reminded that you have no freedom of choice, it's tough to stay motivated to pretend you're doing anything other than job.

But what I think is interesting is trying to figure out the minimal amount of motivation required to give characters (and their players) a compelling reason to "take the bait." I think the long-running ***Vampire: The Dark Ages*** campaign (which I only guest-GMed) is the first time I tried my hand at minimal motivation. In that adventure, the primary PC was the Lady of the land, complete with castle, servants, and the like. Previous adventures focused on invading armies, great attacking threats, and so on. But to begin that adventure, I tried a different tack: I had a child request an audience with the Lady, and ask her if she would be willing to lie for him.

(As a side note for those interested behind the scenes, the Lady in question was one of the Sidhe from the ***Changeling*** neck of the ***Dark Ages*** universe. One of the things that they're not supposed to do is tell a lie; it doesn't cause *great* malady to the character, but it is slightly unpleasant. As such, being asked to tell a lie isn't as trivial a deal as it might be in, say, ***Shadowrun.***)

Now, having been asked to tell a lie, she took the bait and asked, "What lie?" To which the boy requested that, should his mother ask the Lady, would the Lady be willing to say that the boy worked for her for a time. The line leading from the player to the GM's screen tugged slightly, and she continued, "Why would you want me to do such?"

"Well, you see . . . our family needed money to pay for medicine, and I got it for her, and my mother is asking where I got the money."

"I see. And where, exactly, did you get this money?"

"From a man in the woods."

"Okay; and what did the man in the woods ask in return?"

"Nothing; he just said that I needed to sign a piece of paper with some writing on it. So I made my mark on there."

"And what did the paper say?"

<blank stares from illiterate peasant child>

(I'm glossing over the various interaction rolls here, of course. And don't let my use of quotes fool you; things were almost certainly said differently.)

Subsequent investigation revealed that the boy did not, in fact, have a soul, which lead to the (correct) conclusion that infernalists were plotting within the confines of the fiefdom. And much hilarity ensued, ultimately resolving in the

repeated union of the pointy edges of swords with the fleshy bits of cultists.

Now, it would have been trivial to begin this adventure in a more "traditional" way: A blood-covered body in a barn (thanks, *Ultima VII!*), a rabid attack by crazed cultists in the streets of the village. But by beginning as small as possible, the larger whole of the plot was able to unfold that much more naturally, and the characters (and players) were hooked by the time they knew the whole. And the sense of discovery remained intact, likening more to the first aroma of a hopefully satisfying meal rather than the steaming tray of brontosaurus ribs hooked onto the side of the car and tipping it over.

I wrote about another example of minimal motivation in a [previous installment](), but I'll mention it again here; besides, I never told the rest of that anecdote which proves somewhat illuminating here. In my *Aberrant* campaign, I actually started the campaign about six months before the "canonical" beginning, primarily to give the PCs a chance to meet Slider, the everyone-loves-her metahuman whose murder ends up being a catalyst for Things Going To Heck. (I figured that even having one brief encounter -- where they end up saving Slider's life, no less -- would be worth more as a plot hook than starting in the thick of things.)

Anyway, I was attempting to keep the campaign at least somewhat realistic, so I had everyone pick their own birthday. One player (without having read any of the *Aberrant* source material) happened to pick the exact day that Slider was going to get murdered. So, when reporting the news of Slider's death to the players, I ended that scene by announcing a mail delivery . . . which happened to contain a birthday card from Slider to the character. (And, yes, lover of props that I am, I gave a real card.)

Now, the mere fact of the meeting alone should have served as minimal motivation enough to investigate her murder. But there was another clue built-in . . . one which my players never picked up on. For one of the dotted eyes in the card, I had punched it out further from the other side, making a tiny hole. I then crumpled up a tiny ball of black-markered paper and inserted it into that hole, making it a somewhat more distinctive "bump" than normal. Had the players discovered it, I would have informed them that it was unusual, and had they continued investigating, they would have had a good shot at discovering that it was a [microdot](), with incriminating information to help unravel the larger conspiracies. Unfortunately the players never discovered this aspect, and the campaign ended before I could bring up the latent clue again.

Remember this lack anecdote, as it'll come up again. Next week I'll go into more detail about how to incorporate minimal motivations into your campaign. Until then, just remember what I've been using as an excuse for years: Smaller is better.

--Steven Marsh

Kirby-2

Part II

by Steve Kenson

Kirby-2 Today

The current state of affairs on present-day Kirby-2 are hopeful, depending on what it is you're hoping for: The United Nations is a growing world power working towards a unified and peaceful global community backed by scientific advancement, devotion to human rights, and aided by an elite team of powerful metahumans.

The United Nations

Even observers from Homeline hardly recognize the United Nations of Kirby-2. Gone is the polite international debating society, replaced by the first stirrings of a world government in the early years of a very successful series of programs for getting an often-contentious international community to cooperate for the greater good of humanity. The UN and all of its various bodies have been tremendously revitalized by the newfound ability to get things done, although some say there are already signs the organization needs to slow down before that power goes to its collective head.

The various member nations have certainly stopped treating the UN as a game; the post of UN ambassador is now one of the most significant in any nation, and the authority of the Secretary-General rivals or exceeds that of any individual national leader. Certainly the policies of the Secretariat have a far greater impact on world affairs than in years past.

Infinity personnel have likened the Kirby-2 UN to what the UN on Homeline might have been if Infinity was a part of the organization rather than independent (although others have said the state of Kirby-2's UN is simply another example of the "impossible" happening there).

Kirby-2's United Nations considers itself the steward of the world as a whole, the creator and enforcer of peace, and, generally speaking, seeks to live up to the ideals of the UN charter, but also, for the first time, has the wealth, power, and authority to help back up those ideals and make them a reality.

UNISON

The United Nations International Superhuman Operations Network (UNISON) is the world's super-power in more ways than one. Not only does UNISON control the most advanced technology on Earth, it also commands the powers and loyalty of a significant number of the world's metahumans. These resources make UNISON a force to be reckoned with, and the closest Kirby-2 has at the moment to a world-government. More than a few people have observed that UNISON occupies a role quite similar to Infinity's position on Homeline. The involvement of Kirby-2's Dr. Paul VanZandt in founding UNISON only reinforces that view.

Kirby-2 Technology

Kirby-2's conventional technology is TL8, much like Homeline (despite the local year being earlier). Where Kirby-2 differs dramatically from Homeline is in the area of the *unconventional.* The parallel has numerous examples of "superscience" technology: force fields, teleportation, energy weapons, cold fusion power, forced-growth cloning, and so forth. Infinity agents have acquired samples of Kirby-2's technology and researchers have been disappointed to discover it doesn't work reliably on Homeline. The current theory is that most, if not all, of Kirby-2's superscience is

dependent in some way on the unusual quantum nature of the parallel or its metahuman inhabitants. Therefore it may be impossible for off-worlders to duplicate it.

Some of Kirby-2's superscience is in the hands of major governments and corporations, particularly the United Nations and UNISON, which uses monopolies on certain technologies (like fusion power and teleportation chambers) to maintain their influence with the international community. The rest is found only in the possession of isolated inventors, many of them metahumans. Fairly little superscience has seen widespread use as yet, although some of the UN's programs are aimed at changing this.

Infinity and Centrum's greatest concern is that Kirby-2 will develop practical parachronic technology. Thus far, all attempts to do so have ended in varying levels of disaster (including more than one abortive inter-dimensional invasion from another parallel). It's been suggested (perhaps too optimistically) that Kirby-2's quantum instability means the inhabitants *can't* develop parachronics, or at least such technology won't ever work reliably there. On the other hand, Infinity and Centrum technology works just fine on the parallel, and just the possibility of a parachronic-capable Kirby-2 is enough to keep Infinity and Centrum worried. Both sides are prepared to do whatever is necessary to keep the Secret.

Computers

Kirby-2's computer technology is cutting-edge TL8 with some superscience AI. Thus far, artificial intelligence on Kirby-2 has come into existence purely by accident and efforts to duplicate it have failed. One AI, called Pericles, has become a free-willed agent of UNISON and a supporter of the U.N.'s goals. Another, known as Overmind, has adopted an attitude of superiority toward organic life, and believes machines are destined to replace biological organisms in the inevitable march of evolution. This second AI may be a parallel version of the Overmind from Steel, although thus far it hasn't extended its reach as far as that Overmind (thanks in part to Pericles and various metahumans). UNISON efforts to capture or neutralize the rogue AI have not yet been successful. Infinity sincerely hopes it does not find a means to contact its alternate on Steel.

Energy Weapons

Compact energy cells have made blasters and sonic stunners practical (if expensive) weapons on Kirby-2. U.N. security personnel are routinely armed with stunners, and they are becoming a popular alternative to more lethal self-defense options. UNISON hopes to institute programs of exchanging lethal firearms for stunners and encouraging member nations to create stronger gun-control measures.

Force Fields

Force field technology has only recently reached a practical stage on Kirby-2 and currently requires fairly bulky emitters, making them usable only on installations and large vehicles. Asgard Station has both external and internal force field emitters for security, as do many U.N. installations on Earth. Force fields require considerable amount of energy and usually have to run off a fusion plant.

Space

Kirby-2's space-flight technology is in advance of Homeline (which has neglected space travel in favor of parachronics). The most cutting-edge space technology is in the hands of the UN International Space Agency (UNISA). The UN operates a laser-powered launch facility on Mt. Kilimanjaro called the "Bifrost Bridge," capable of sending payloads into Earth orbit on a regular basis, including orbiters that can return and land like conventional aircraft. Bifrost is used to place new satellites in orbit; most contact with orbital facilities is handled via teleporter (see *Teleporters,* below).

The UN also operates Asgard, the world's largest permanent space station. Asgard serves as an orbital watch facility, a relay station for communications and earth-based teleporters, and a base of operations for UNISON.

Although researchers are working on a faster-than-light stardrive, a practical prototype has yet to appear. Previous examples (developed by lone inventors) have proven unstable or otherwise problematic. Faster than light travel *may* have existed on Kirby-2 before, but if so it was eliminated by a previous reality quake.

Teleporters

Kirby-2 teleporter technology uses a "quantum flux" principle wherein transitional matter exists essentially in two places at the same time. Thus the space inside two separate teleportation chambers can be made to coexist briefly, allowing passengers and cargo to move from one chamber to the other instantly. A teleport chamber is required at each end to transmit and receive; "open-ended" teleportation is not yet possible. So teleports are limited between the different "transfer points" in a dedicated network.

The UN controls the largest teleport network, with transfer stations in the capitol cities of all member nations, coordinated by control systems on board Asgard Station. The UN also leases the technology to other parties (mainly corporations) for shipping and travel, but its use is carefully regulated.

Theoretically, a teleporter's range is unlimited, but the greatest distance bridged thus far is between Earth and the Moon. Expansion of the teleport network is limited by the need to build a transfer station at the arrival point. The power costs are also tremendous, requiring the output of a fusion plant and limiting the effective size of the chambers; teleporters large enough to move anything bigger than an SUV (or a military humvee) are prohibitively expensive.

Teleporter technology is as close as Kirby-2 has come to parachronics. Some of the quantum principles are similar, and accidents or malfunctions involving teleporters have bridged dimensions in the past, but no one has been able to deliberately duplicate their effects. Infinity scientists think the "soft" nature of Kirby-2's quantum infrastructure makes teleportation possible; efforts to implement the technology elsewhere have failed.

Weird Science

Kirby-2's history has numerous examples of "weird science" technology: unique super-science devices attributed to particular inventors that are never successfully replicated. Infinity has observed similar phenomena on parallels like Gernsback and Klatuu. Thus, nearly any sort of superscience can (and has) shown up on Kirby-2, but most of it is unique and cannot be duplicated, even by local scientists. Theories abound as to why: The inventions may be the result of some unique metahuman power of their inventors, the result of shifts in Kirby-2's quantum flux, or examples of very advanced super-science (requiring more effort to understand and replicate). All anyone knows for sure is scientific geniuses on Kirby-2 can potentially come up with *anything,* another reason Infinity can't rule out someone there developing parachronics.

Campaigning in Kirby-2

Campaigns on Kirby-2 can range from four-color superheroics as members of UNISON to exploration of the parallel's past ages (through the remnants left behind by the reality quakes) or involvement in the parachronic war between different factions of the Infinite Worlds.

UNISON Teams

The default Kirby-2 campaign sets the heroes up as members of a UNISON team stationed in the capitol city of a UN member nation, or perhaps a "special ops" team on board Asgard Station, able to teleport to the site of an emergency or mission at a moment's notice. The heroes

Is Kirby-2 Dangerous?

There is some concern among the intertemporal factions about Kirby-2's unstable nature. In addition to the problems posed by a world of metahumans, there's the possibility Kirby-2 *itself* might be a danger to the continuum. Infinity researchers have speculated about the possibility of another reality quake hitting the parallel, a "big one" that makes all the previous quakes look like minor tremors by comparison. A large enough disruption might literally tear Kirby-2's reality apart at the quantum level.

The problem is, no one knows exactly what the

contend with metahuman criminals, terrorists, violators of the UN's edicts, and so forth while assisting local law enforcement, making public relations appearances, and using their powers to further UNISON's other social, economic, and technological programs.

The adventures of a public UNISON team are much like stories from superhero comic books. GMs interested in a grittier more post-modern approach can set the heroes up as agents of a secret "black ops" division of UNISON, kept secret from the public and perhaps even the UN General Assembly! These metahumans handle the dirty work UNISON can't publicly acknowledge, which may well include a "secret war" against parachronic invaders (see *Interworld Adventures,* below).

Reality Archaeologists

Kirby-2's regular reality quakes make it an ideal for a group of "reality archaeologists" searching around and digging up elements of the world's forgotten and buried past. They might be freelancers or members of a secret UNISON division devoted to dealing with subduction zones, irruptors, and other related phenomena. Perhaps one or more members of the team (or their patrons) are actually irruptors from a previous "version" of Kirby-2! With no real existence in the new continuity, such characters make ideal covert agents. They also recall details about earlier ages, since they were actually there!

The reasons for digging up the past on Kirby-2 vary. Some reality archaeologists may simply want to preserve the past, and better understand the nature of the reality quakes and revisions of Kirby-2's present and future. Others may want to find some way of restoring a bygone age, even if it means wiping out the current continuity. Lastly, there are those with a strong interest in keeping the true nature of Kirby-2's reality a secret, *their* secret, and rivals interested in revealing the truth.

Interworld Adventures

There are plenty of opportunities to use Kirby-2 as part of a larger *Infinite Worlds* campaign. The setting's metahuman powers and superscience technology make it a potential threat as well as a tempting target for any of the intertemporal factions, all of whom must exercise caution when dealing with the world and its inhabitants.

Infinity takes the most enlightened view toward Kirby-2, but even they are frightened by the potential implications of UNISON getting hold of parachronic technology. While the organization appears benevolent, Infinity isn't sure it wants to share with yet another parachronic power, and it's also not certain how Kirby-2's UN will react to the existence of cross-time rivals. Although there are some who advocate an alliance with UNISON, for now the Infinity Council has placed the world off-limits to anyone but the Patrol, and the official policy is one of containment: keep the locals from developing parachronics, isolate any outtime visitors, and prevent them from interfering in local events without exposing the Secret.

Centrum is even more concerned about Kirby-2 than Infinity, but less united in its attitude. Centrum's official policy is roughly the same: Observe, keep the locals from developing parachronics, and watch out for potential threats to Centrum security. A secondary goal is research into Kirby-2 technology and metahuman powers, but thus far evidence suggests neither has much potential outside the parallel.

Two minority views are fighting it out over what to do next on Kirby-2. Centrum isolationists believe the parallel

repercussions would be for other parallels. The experts *think* the damage would be localized on Kirby-2's quantum level, which means it wouldn't affect either Homeline or Centrum, but they don't know for sure. Moreover, even if that's the case, the aftershocks from the reality quake could still cause widespread chaos, particularly on the various echo parallels, some of which might be shifted to other quanta, which could (possibly) cause a domino effect, triggering banestorms or even reality quakes on other parallels and quantum levels.

The question is whether or not this massive reality quake is an inevitable part of Kirby-2's quantum structure or if it is preventable. The possibility Kirby-2 is a ticking intertemporal time bomb is one reason Infinity and Centrum's Interworld Service both tread *very* carefully, and why Centrum isn't in a hurry to deliberately trigger another reality quake there. Debate over what to do about Kirby-2 goes on while the current policy remains to wait, watch, and do everything possible to keep anyone else from upsetting the apple cart.

poses a serious threat. They want to find a means to eliminate that threat. Proposals include shifting Kirby-2's quantum position (perhaps pushing it out of the accessible band altogether) or triggering a deliberate reality quake to weaken it, or even destroy it (although this is by far the most extreme approach). The other faction sees tremendous potential on Kirby-2, if its UN could be influenced toward Centrum ways of thinking. They're still bothered by what to do with the metahumans, but feel the potential advantages of making Kirby-2 a client state shouldn't be ignored. Their proposals often revolve around tinkering with one of Kirby-2's echo-parallels to modify its history to suit Centrum's tastes (and perhaps quell some concerns from the other factions).

Reich-5 sees Kirby-2 as an opportunity. The "malleable" nature of the parallel offers them a chance to shape it to suit their wishes. The current plan is to find a means to change the course of Kirby-2's Second World War, creating a present day much better suited to the World Axis' tastes. The trouble has been finding a means of reaching the right quantum echo and executing the changes, given Reich-5's spotty and unreliable parachronic capabilities.

Some Cabal mages call Kirby-2 "a shadow of higher realms." There's some evidence the Cabal has extended tendrils into the parallel, and it may have been present (or even responsible . . .) for one or more of the previous reality quakes. Certainly, Kirby-2 has some magical phenomena, which may be of interest to the Cabal, and who knows which of the parallel's various wizards, demons, or other beings are actually Cabal members? It's not beyond the realm of possibility that the reality quakes are part of some *deliberate* effort in "reality engineering" to create a world attuned to particular higher cosmic archetypes for purposes as yet unknown.

Characters in an interworld campaign on Kirby-2 can be native metahumans dealing with "invaders" from other worlds trying to manipulate theirs, or members of any of the cross-time factions carrying out their own agendas and working to thwart the plans of their rivals. Perhaps UNISON *does* develop practical parachronic travel -- possibly based on its teleporter technology -- and enters the parachronic conflict, becoming another player on the ***Infinite Worlds*** stage.

The Drifters

Kirby-2 can kick off an ***Infinite Worlds*** campaign wherein the player characters are a diverse group of metahumans from different periods of Kirby-2's history, or even different Kirby or metahuman worldlines. They are all "unstuck in time" due to reality quakes and other ontological shifts, leaving them shifting from world to world. They might do so randomly or under the control of some outside force, ranging from an existing faction (the Cabal being the most obvious choice) to a cosmic being using them to repair (or destabilize) the worldlines. Marvel Comics' *Exiles* is the perfect model for this type of campaign.

Characters

Characters in a Kirby-2 campaign are most likely supers, based on 500 or more character points. Gamemasters may want to consult ***GURPS Powers*** for guidelines and ideas on powers, power levels, and so forth.

Advantages

The following advantages are significant in some way to characters from Kirby-2:

Magery

This advantage is essentially unknown on Kirby-2. There is magic (the worldline is normal mana) and magical powers, but no mages as such. Kirby-2's "mages" are actually

The Eidolon Emanation

Some adepts of the Cabal believe metahumans on Kirby-2 channel eidolons of the great eikones of Briah, the Iconic Realm. In essence, they are avatars of cosmic forces, playing out archetypal interactions over and over. The 20-year cycle of reality quakes is related to the meton year (alignment of the sun and moon, and the related spheres of Tiphereth and Yesod), or possibly a Saturn alignment (Saturn being associated with death and transformation). Metahuman powers, whatever their apparent origin, are essentially spiritual or mystical in nature, a reflection of the higher reality of Briah.

It's possible these Cabalists are correct, and Kirby-2

supers with mana-dependent powers. Some of them even require the traditional trappings of spellcasting (mystical gestures, incantations, and so forth), but they are not traditional spells. Anyone with this advantage can cast spells normally on Kirby-2 like any other normal mana world, but is likely an outtime visitor.

Temporal Inertia

On Kirby-2, this advantage grants some immunity to changes in "continuity" caused by reality quakes and similar shifts. Characters with Temporal Inertia *always* exist on Kirby-2, regardless of how reality changes. They may or may not have the same traits, or even powers, but they continue to exist, even if history becomes radically different. Such characters also nearly always have counterparts on parallel worlds. Such "eternals" from Kirby-2 may even have doppelgangers on Homeline, some of whom could be agents of the Infinity Patrol!

is essentially a shadow-stage for archetypal avatars to play out their parts in the cosmic drama. If so, then outsiders may be able to influence the higher realms by changing the outcome of these conflicts. Some Cabalists think so, claiming intervention on Kirby-2 might serve as a kind of sympathetic magic, sending ripples of change through the Four Realms. The right intervention at a key moment in time could trigger a reality quake with far more wide-reaching effects than just altering the present-day of one parallel. Even if the Cabal's mystical theories on the origins of metahumans are entirely off base, it's possible Kirby-2 has some other sort of connection to the continuum -- whether iconic symbolism or quantum resonance -- and tinkering with it may still have effects felt throughout the Infinite Worlds.

Trained by a Master

Some "super normals" on Kirby-2 have this advantage (or Weapon Master, or both), giving them access to various cinematic skills and abilities and making them the equal of some metahumans. Infinity explains the amazing things these "normal" people can do as another facet of Kirby-2's reality. Whether or not such individuals are actually metahuman is a matter of some debate.

UNISON Membership

Membership in UNISON grants certain advantages and disadvantages: Duty (to UNISON, all the time, -15 points), Legal Enforcement Powers (10 points), Legal Immunity (5 points), Military Rank 4 (20 points), Patron (United Nations, multinational, extensive political power, quite often, 90 points), Security Clearance (5 points). *125 points.*

Unusual Background

Supers aren't that unusual on Kirby-2, so there is no Unusual Background required to have powers. The GM may require an Unusual Background to have powers or other traits not commonly found on Kirby-2. One particular Unusual Background may show up in Kirby-2 campaigns:

Irruptor: You are a living "remnant" of one of Kirby-2's earlier realities, a survivor of one or more reality quakes. Among other things, you are Zeroed in the present-day; you literally *shouldn't exist!* You also have the Temporal Inertia advantage. You survived one reality quake; other ones aren't going to get rid of you. You may possess traits common to your own original reality, traits which may or may not presently exist. You may also have access to information from your reality, some of which is useful in the present day. For example, perhaps you knew the previous incarnations one or more present-day metahumans. While they're no longer *exactly* the same, many things about them are, including things that haven't "happened" yet! *20 points.*

Disadvantages

Mental disadvantages and metahuman powers seem to go hand-in-hand. It may be that certain extreme mental states are more likely to cause origins, or to provide powers, or it could be the other way around; having powers causes metahumans to develop various psychological neuroses and psychoses. Whatever the case, metahumans tend to fall

toward either end of the moral spectrum. Heroes commonly have disadvantages like Code of Honor, Honesty, Overconfident, Pacifism (Cannot Kill), and Sense of Duty. Villains frequently have Megalomania (or are at least Overconfident). Bully, Sadism, and similar negative disadvantages are also common (although not Bloodlust or disadvantages that make villains casual killers, these are actually relatively rare).

Unique

Characters with this disadvantage *never* survive a reality quake or any other change in Kirby-2's reality; such changes always wipe them entirely from existence. If the change is somehow reversed, Unique characters are also restored, but otherwise they're gone for good. GMs should only permit this disadvantage if reality quakes and similar alterations are expected to be a part of the campaign.

Powers

Super-powers are possible -- and relatively common -- on Kirby-2. Metahumans are about one-in-a-million, but unevenly distributed, favoring technological nations over the Third World. The reason for this remains unknown, although theories abound. More than one researcher has noted Kirby-2's metahumans are most concentrated in nations where comic books are the most popular on Homeline, such as the United States, Europe, and Japan. Whether or not there is a causal relationship remains unknown.

All the origins and power sources discussed in *GURPS Powers* are available on Kirby-2, although accidental and super powers are by far the most common. There's no real difference between psionic and super powers here; essentially super powers *are* psionic, but capable of much wider (and more powerful) range of effects than psi on most other worlds.

Magic does exist on Kirby-2. However, Magery is all but nonexistent. There are metahumans with magical powers (drawing upon the local mana), even "super-mages" with spell-like abilities, but no spellcasting as it is known on other magical worldlines like Yrth or Merlin.

Skills

Generally, the standard skills from *Basic Set* are known on Kirby-2 as well, with the following notations.

Wildcard Skills

The GM may want to use the option for Wildcard Skills in *Basic Set* to handle Kirbyan characters with broad mastery of a particular area of skill, including (but not limited to) Detective!, Guns!, Martial Arts!, and Science!

Weird Science

On Kirby-2, this skill might better be called "Super Science." It is the skill of dealing with radical scientific theories and technologies beyond the local Tech Level. Although considerable superscience exists on Kirby-2, it isn't really part of the local TL (or any Tech Level) at all. This is, normal scientific skills can't comprehend or create it, only Weird Science can. This skill is less widespread than standard or even Wildcard scientific skills; it's mostly found among maverick, eccentric inventors and metahumans.

The Lost Valley

by Matt Riggsby

Pilgrimages are a fixture in many religious traditions. A twist found in some traditions is that their pilgrimage sites are semi-secret. A Christian pilgrim, for example, always knows where Jerusalem is; indeed, it's literally the center of the Medieval Christian universe. A Buddhist pilgrim, on the other hand, may only hear rumors of the whereabouts of Shambala. Getting there requires a long and difficult journey, no matter where you start from, and you certainly won't stumble over it by chance (although you might not know that *that's* what you're looking for). The journey is a trip through one's soul as much as through the landscape. Which brings us to the Lost Valley.

Appetizer: Why Go There?

The Lost Valley is a hidden earthly paradise, perhaps the ultimate source of legends of Shangri La, Eden, and the Fountain of Youth. It is said that you can find peace there. Or healing. Or wisdom. Or whatever else you need.

The problem, of course, is getting there. In order to achieve their goal, pilgrims must overcome three different kinds of challenges: physical, mental, and moral. The first two are obvious: Directions are vague and require considerable puzzling out, but they do clearly take the pilgrim through rough terrain. The moral dimension is less clear, particularly to skeptics, but believers see the physical journey as a symbol for what's really important, the development of the spirit. Until you've passed all three tests, you'll never find the Lost Valley.

First Course: The Physical Challenge

Spiritual journeys are, most obviously, physically difficult, and they're often tests of endurance. Instructions to reach the Lost Valley may start at a city, but they inevitably lead through the wilderness. The journey will probably lead through at least one of the types of terrain listed here, with some of the obstacles listed:

- **Desert:** Sandstorms, quicksand, poor water supplies and dehydration.
- **Mountains:** Ice, hidden crevices, snowstorms, very steep slopes.
- **Swamp:** Thick mud, impassible vegetation, disease-carrying insects.

A journey might also take the pilgrims over river rapids, and storms, bandits, ferocious beasts, and, in appropriate campaign worlds, monsters are always a possibility. Transportation difficulties may also arise: washed-out bridges, sick animals, engine trouble, and political unrest in areas the pilgrims must travel through.

Second Course: The Mental Challenge

The pilgrims can find at least some directions to the Lost Valley; there'd be little point setting out if they couldn't. However, nothing about them will be clear or explicit. Such instructions as they can find are probably phrased in cryptic or poetic language, and many of those which aren't may be ambiguous or rely on unique circumstances. For example, they may find an account of a journey to the Lost Valley which goes something like this:

"We set out that day from the seat of emeralds, guiding our steps by the precise

point of sunrise. For several days we traveled, passing over as many fords, until we reached a river on which we sailed south until we passed between a brother on one hand and a sister on the other."

At first glance, most of this is meaningless. What, for example, is "the seat of emeralds?" A wealthy city? A shrine known for green decorations? In which direction did the author travel? That would depend on exactly which day he left the cryptic "seat of emeralds." And who or what are the brother and sister? Similar hills on either side of the river? Twin towns?

Alternatively, or even at the same time, instructions may consist of principles to follow rather than specific directions. For example, the directions to the valley might be as simple as "follow the peacock." The characters will have to look everywhere for a series of signs: peacocks, clouds shaped like peacocks, peacock-embroidered banners, and so on. Getting to the valley becomes a matter of keeping an eye out for the relevant symbol or symbols, though following that sort of advice is a test of faith as much as a mental challenge, which brings us to the third test?

be happy to point out the allegorical nature of their journey, the moral tests they're likely to face (and how they're likely to fail them), and so on. Skeptics don't need to encounter anything overtly supernatural, but believers can easily match the path of their journey to teachings they should be picking up on.

Third Course: The Moral Challenge

This is the tricky part. The physical and intellectual difficulty of the quest are obvious. What skeptical characters might not accept is that every interaction on their quest is a test of their character and spiritual well-being. Here are some possibilities:

- The pilgrims are confronted by bandits. Are they willing to exchange all of their material goods for safety, or are they willing to kill other living beings in order to regain mere possessions (yes, we thought that was funny, too)?
- The pilgrims engage a guide or make friends along the way. Once a relationship has been established, a rival appears, challenging him to a duel to the death because of a matter of family honor. The friend appeals to the pilgrims for aid. Do they fight in his place? Attempt to mediate the dispute? Stay out of it?
- The characters encounter the survivors of a small caravan which as been attacked by bandits. The survivors are on their way back to the nearest town. Do they render aid to the survivors? Will they go out of their way to find and wipe out the bandits to protect other travelers?
- The characters find a bundle of valuable goods. Later, they meet a party of traveling merchants bemoaning the loss of an important part of their cargo. Will they attempt to return their valuable property once they run across it?
- A wealthy merchant takes a liking to the characters and offers them jobs in a caravan going a different direction from their quest. Do they leave their path for money?

In games where characters have moral and emotional flaws (greed, anger management issues, and the like), the GM should be sure to come up with moral challenges which impact on them.

Just what the pilgrims have to do to pass their moral tests is up to the GM and will depend on whatever moral and supernatural order she wants the hidden valley to represent. However, rather than turn the adventure into a protracted debate over ethics, it may be best simply to make the *players* aware that their characters' actions are being measured by a moral standard. If they can come up with in-character justifications for their actions which aren't utterly self-serving, they can probably reach the valley, but they'll have to give it some thought before they do.

Dessert Trolley: The Goal

When (or if) characters finally reach the valley, they'll find an unremarkable if picturesque place with lush greenery, tidy little peasant farms, and a small but attractive temple complex. The residents will appear to be very happy and at peace with one another, and the monks at the temple will happily take them in. Nobody appears particularly wealthy, but everyone is healthy and well-fed. The residents don't really keep track of time, but new arrivals may eventually figure out that they're virtually immortal.

In the Lost Valley, wounds heal as quickly as naturally possible, and even crippling wounds may be healed over time. For example, in *GURPS* terms, Physician rolls always succeed; crippled limbs, but not lost ones, will heal regardless of HT rolls; and high levels of Esoteric Medicine skill are available. Mental and moral flaws will be easier to resist as well. The valley may also be the place to learn a number of exotic martial arts, probably with a heavy defensive focus, and long-lost wisdom (or, in appropriate campaigns, powerful spells) can be easily located in the temple's extensive library.

In terms of an overall campaign, the valley might be an important stop along the way. It would be an ideal place, for example, to recover from lasting demon-inflicted wounds and stock up on useful information while trying to stop said demons from taking over the world. It could even be a final destination for a campaign, if characters are interested in retiring to a peaceful existence rather than accumulating wealth and power until the day they die.

Coffee?: What Else Can Happen

Then again, contentment and a simple, peaceful life can make for a boring game, and even an attempt to retire to an earthly paradise doesn't have to succeed. Here are some ways to continue adventuring even if characters want to stay in their happy place:

- Getting to the valley isn't quite so difficult for mystically powerful entities as it is for the average Joe. Though the people and the land heal quickly, they must still defend themselves against attack by demons, evil spirits, or simply powerful humans motivated by a primal force of evil. Semi-retired adventurers may have to take up their weapons again and even go back out into the world to fight off the valley's enemies.
- The valley may pose an irresistible mystery to curious characters. Reading through ancient records (or simply listening to long-time residents), they may learn that just as the Lost Valley is a focus for good in the world, there's a place which represents the opposite, a city or nation which is a focus for evil. In what could be the ultimate extension of the moral challenges they faced to get to the valley, PCs may consider whether or not to set out on their own to defeat this evil place (which, as in the previous suggestion, may threaten the valley), and even wonder whether or not it would change things. Can the valley's enemies truly be defeated, or will evil reemerge in another form? Conversely, if the valley is destroyed, will good reemerge elsewhere?
- Perhaps the evil isn't so far away, and the valley is too good to be true. The monks of the temple gather the healthful energies which suffuse the valley by secret necromantic rites. But if someone weren't quietly murdered every so often, the rest of the valley's residents would lose their immortality. Further research might indicate that the monks aren't creating healthful energy, but are simply stealing it, vampire-like, from the rest of the world, and *everyone* outside the valley would be slightly better off if it stopped. If that's not enough to get morally cleansed PCs in action, maybe they'll be guests of honor at the next human sacrifice.

Running a Successful One Shot

by Caleb Dillon

So, you're in a hobby shop and see an ad on a bulletin board for a group of players in need of a GM. Or, you're out shopping and run into an old college buddy from your freshman gaming group, and he wants to start up a new group. Or maybe you and some friends and have just got back from the latest sci-fi flick, and more than a few of them suddenly seem very interested in (what they previously thought was) a pretty dorky hobby. Three different problems, one common solution:

You need an adventure. More specifically, you need a one-shot.

Unlike a traditional adventure, which can span several gaming sessions, or a campaign, where you have (seemingly) all the time in the world to plan events, seed plot hooks, and develop NPCs, a one-shot follows its own set of rules. Time always seems to run short and expire too quickly, and if you're not careful, you'll leave the table that night feeling disappointed, and worse, you'll have disappointed your players.

Whether you're starting up a new gaming group, reuniting an old one, or are just looking to host a once in a while get together between friends, every GM eventually runs into the hurdle of running a successful one-shot.

Experienced GMs will tell you that cramming an entire adventure into one evening ain't easy, especially if you're the sort of storyteller that wants a complete story, with a well laid arc, and exciting climax, and a satisfying conclusion.

To stop this from happening, a few simple guidelines will help to ensure (or at least better your chances of) a successful evening:

Get People Excited About the Game in Advance: This means more than just telling them you're planning on having a game. Roleplaying games are about interaction. Otherwise, we'd just sit home with a two-liter of Coke and play an online RPG (and don't tell me you haven't). It's never too early to ask your players what they'd like to play, the kinds of characters they'd be interested in running, and whether they can commit to a single evening (and more importantly a specific evening). Nothing is worse than putting together a well thought out one-shot than to have not enough players show, or worse, all your players show up late, cutting your game time short.

Find an Optimal Time: Guess what, gamers have lives outside of gaming just like regular people. It's true. They have kids, families, soccer games, dentist appointments, and the like. This is why most people get out of the gaming racket; they don't have any more time to play, let alone think up a story. This is also what makes a one-shot ideal for folks just like these, on a set schedule with little time to spare. Sell them on the "it's just one evening" bit, and throw in something about it "being like old times". Once you have their attention, you'll have to find a date and time that works for as many of your players as possible. Weekends are often full of errands, so how about a weeknight, say from 6-10? One-shots are meant to be played in just a few hours, so keep to that timeframe.

Use a World Your Players are Already Familiar With: And a game, for that matter. This may seem obvious, but plenty of GMs think a one-shot is a great time to a run a "Welcome to Lankhmar" style game, where not only the players but the characters as well are introduced to a new and exciting realm (and maybe an entirely new rules system). Sound too good to be true? Guess what . . . it is. The point of the one-shot is to complete an entire story arc in a single session, and if you spend most of the evening having NPCs explain things to the PCs ("No, Thogrin, here in Ismere, magic is forbidden. Hey, that walking stick of yours sure looks like a *staff of frost.*"), you'll never get to the meat and potatoes of the adventure. While having the PCs wander into a new town with a dark secret is one thing, having them stumble into an entirely new world is completely different, and will chew up your evening fast.

Pre-Generate or at Least Pre-Approve Characters in Advance: Okay, you've decided on a game system, a place and time, and the level of scenario you'd like to play. Nuts, don't we still have to make characters? Doesn't that take, like, hours? Never fear. With the advent of the Internet, this too becomes simple mechanics. If you announce the game

far enough in advance, your players should have time to create characters on their own and send them to you (either as PDFs or file attachments), or drop them off at your house. You could even meet up on a lunch break, so that you could look the character over, make notes, ask questions, and so on. If you prefer, and your players agree, you can even generate a batch of characters in advance that you think work well with the game your planning. As a rule, generate extra characters, to give your players plenty of options. If your players complain that they want to make their own characters, then reward them with the experience from the adventure and tell them they can use those accumulated points towards generating characters in the next adventure.

Keep It Simple: The worst thing you can do in putting together a one-shot is think too hard about it. If you find yourself saying "Okay, in this encounter our heroes learn about the hidden city. But first, they must quest for the map that will lead them there, and that map lies buried in the tomb . . ." then you've already gone too far. It'd be enough of a goal to have the players quest for the map, or raid the tomb, but not both, and certainly not before questing for the hidden city. Simplify! If you can't sum up the adventure in one sentence, like "Buried Alive" or "Lost at Sea," then chances are you've gone overboard and won't be able to fit the scenario into a single evening. The best one-shot I ever read involved a blizzard trapping the players in a fort with a newly born Slaadi, picking off the characters one by one. Simple scenario, one antagonist, with lots of room for creativity.

Map It Out: Time is not on your side when running a one-shot. You have a finite evening in which to tell an entire story, so you had better know the details of that story, forward and back. If you keep the story simple, this shouldn't be a problem. Have a well-laid groundwork to work from. If the PCs are going to be raiding an enemy camp, map out the camp! Know what each tent holds, where the enemies will be, and when. This doesn't necessarily mean coming up with a timeline (unless that helps you, in which case do it), but the more planning you the more you can make adjustments when the PCs surprise you with their characters' actions (and they will). As a rule of thumb, for a one-shot, stick to one antagonist, one goal, one item, and so on. Any more, or too many plot twists, and you'll be scrambling to tie up all the lose ends as the evening winds down.

No New Players: At first, this rule sounds harsh. Let me explain. We all know that new players are a key ingredient in spreading the word about how fun a time you can have roleplaying. I mean, what couldn't be more fun; friends, little plastic miniatures, chips, carnage, what else do you need? That being said, explaining the game (with a few exceptions like *Munchkin*) takes time, a lot of time, especially if the player has never played an RPG before. So while it's great to have new players *observe* a one-shot, allowing them to play will eat up your evening. ("No Tommy, you roll a this die to hit, and this die is for damage, and this die is a d12, which never gets used.") Encourage them to attend, but ask that they save their questions until after the game, and then invite them to return to a regular session so they can play themselves.

Be Prepared: It works for the Boy Scouts, and it works for a one-shot. Better than just calling your friends the day of to remind them about the game, send out an email the week before as a friendly reminder, complete with directions and contact numbers in case they get lost (better yet, host the game somewhere everyone is familiar with if at all possible). Then, the day of, send out another email, or -- better yet -- instant message the players to get final RSVPs. Arrive early so that you can set out snacks, tables and chairs, dice, books, miniatures; whatever you'll need to run the game. That way, when people get there, they won't be waiting on you.

Set the Mood: A good GM controls his environment. He avoids distractions such as TV and radio unless he is using these to create ambiance. For example, if you're hosting a spooky murder mystery, hold the game at night, in a candle lit room. Better yet, hold it outside, in the middle of the woods, with just a table, some candles, and a battery powered boom box for those *Midnight Syndicate* CDs you've been holding onto (which, by the way, are awesome if you haven't heard about them by now). More than just noise, however, emphasize early on how you want the game to be played, if you want a lot of out of character discussions, or none at all. Tell the players in a straightforward manner, "From here on out, everything you say, your characters say, period." That way, they won't be surprised when their character gets bolted by a wizard for a wisecrack remark.

Be Aware of Time: Keep an eye on the clock at all times. Be prepared to do away with certain encounters entirely for the sake of time, or at the very least to combine them with others. You may have to drop bigger hints in the players laps for them to fasten onto. If they can't find the entrance to the villain's lair, maybe one of his lackey's offers to show

them the door, in exchange for their protection from his previous masters wrath (maybe he's leading them into a trap, for that matter). You don't want this to feel forced, however, which is why planning a simple adventure is better. Plot based adventures don't complement a one-shot, nor do lengthy battle scenarios. Remember, PCs can earn just as much experience fighting one villain three times as they can from fighting three entirely different villains. Just don't make the mistake of letting them kill said villain off too early!

A Fistful of Adventures

To further simplify your life as a GM, here are 10 scenarios that make for great one-shot seed ideas. They need some filling out, but there's infinite room for variation in each one.

In Dreams: Been itching to throw the PCs into some surreal encounter that you can't seem to fit into your regular campaign? How about just have the PCs wake up to it! You can put them in a limbo-like realm where gravity doesn't exist, or in the court of some dark demon, or both! At the end of the story, when they wake up, throw in something about a strange smell coming from their wineskins, or better yet, don't explain it at all. Keep the players looking over their shoulders for the next few adventures (if the one-shot is the start of a campaign), wondering how they were taken advantage of. It's a little cliché, but it works.

Kill the Dragon (or some other beastie): Every GM looks forward to the day they can pit a dragon against the PCs. And why not? They're big, cool, scaly, and have breath weapons, not to mention treasure! So, do it! Run a mid- to high-power one-shot where the only goal is to kill the dragon. But don't think this scenario is boring; dragons carefully guard their lairs. Maybe this dragon has troll bodyguards, or has inscribed strange symbols in the walls that only his minions are immune to. Perhaps the dragon they seek is one of those arctic breeds, and the lair is so cold the PCs take damage each round they're inside, softening them up for the final encounter. How about giving the dragon some strange and unexpected powers? Nothing shakes up a seemingly standard scenario than a dragon that can hide in shadows!

Before Moonrise: Since time is such a factor in a one-shot, how about using it to your advantage. Force the heroes to act quickly. Maybe they're searching for an ancient relic in a city that only phases into existence for one night of the year, say on the spring equinox, and only before the moon rises to its apex. Variations on this include before sunrise, before dark, and the like. Imagine a city of gold, but the gold has to be spent before the sunset. Talk about a shopping spree (and some peeved merchants later on, to boot).

Sever the Tether: This is a ghost story variation. Most ghosts are tied to the world in some way; they have unresolved issues that they didn't fulfill in life, which now chain them to the world in death. Maybe a tavern master has always had this ghost haunting his cellars (it was there when he bought the place, hence the discount) that he couldn't seem to get rid of. It's never threatened him before, but he doesn't go down to the cellar after dark either, and he hires the PCs not to vanquish it (since the ghost will just come back), but to resolve the ghosts issues, and let it move on to whatever afterlife awaits it. The heroes win not for destroying the ghost, but for helping it, which may involve some sidetracking (perhaps the ghost was murdered by a member of the local thieves' guild).

Time Bomb: In this interesting scenario, a madman (or cultist, or whatever) has hidden magical bombs all over the city (or castle, or the like), and the PCs have a set period of time to find them all, lest they detonate, hurting innocent bystanders, or toppling the structure (resulting in the ultimate deaths of more innocent bystanders). If the bombs are planted in crowded places, (taverns, temples, and the like) even better. The scenario is really great with high-powered heroes who want a challenge. Trying to find 10 needles in a city-size haystack in less than four hours. To make things even more interesting, use a real clock. Let the players know when time runs out, all of the undiscovered bombs will go off. This will heighten drama and discourage OOC discussions.

The Cavern of Doom (or House, or Swamp, or wherever): This is a simple, tried and tested scenario. The PCs are hired to explore a house, or cavern, or the like. What secrets does it hold? What dangers? What mysteries? What evil lurks therein? Are there gold, tomes of ancient lore, magic? Variations on this include raiding tombs, exploring crypts, infiltrating lairs, robbing guilds, and the like.

Murder Mystery: Detective stories and fantasy are not a new innovation. Fritz Leiber's *Fahfrd and the Grey Mouser* explored this genre when it was new, years ago, as well as the game based on H.P. Lovecraft's work, *Call of Cthuhlu,* not to mention the best-selling *Dresden Files* by Jim Butcher or, in more recent years, the introduction of master inquisitives in the ***Eberron*** campaign setting. In fact, detective stories and fantasy compliment each other famously because magic introduces so many other variables. Was the victim being spied on through use of a scrying? Were they poisoned, cursed, or both? Can you use an spell or power to study the murder weapon for additional clues, or speak with the dead to ask the victim how he died? Low-power heroes work best in this scenario, since they have limited means and powers.

Small Town, Big Secret: In the style of M. Night Shymalan's *The Village* or *House of Wax* (both versions) the PCs wander into B.F.E., get thrust into some unfamiliar situation, and find out they are in way over their heads. Maybe they took a short cut through the wilderness and got lost, or were searching for something and became similarly turned around. Do the town's inhabitants refuse to let the heroes leave once they get there, or does the town itself stop them? Maybe a fog rises up, and every way the PCs go, leads them back to where they started. Is the fog full of vile creatures that thwart the PCs every attempt to flee, using hit and run tactics to pick them off, one by one. Isolated and in unfamiliar territory makes for a great one-shot.

From Dusk 'til Dawn: Similar to the Small Town, Big Secret scenario, but on a much smaller scale, the PCs wander into a dangerous place (taverns works well, as do crypts) and have to dive for cover, fast. Perhaps they raid what they thought was an empty tomb only to find it full of vampire spawn, and the heroes are locked in with them until sun up (George Clooney, eat your heart out). Or they were robbing an archmage's library while he was away, only to find his wards were already in place, locking them in the library with another of the mage's defenses, the library guardian (animated objects work well for this, as do homunculus variants and golems). Perhaps the ward alerts the archmage as well, who quickly teleports home (for a final showdown, i.e. boss fight). Or maybe the library (crypt, room, cellar) is booby-trapped. Is there a secret passage leading out? Will the heroes escape in time?

Sinking Ship: Ridley Scott used it in *Alien,* James Cameron used it in *Titanic,* and look where they both are now. Heck, if it worked on *Gilligan's Island,* why not in an RPG? But the PCs on a ship (flying ships are great for this too, like the elemental-powered galleons in ***Eberron***), which, due to some disastrous mistake (weather, pirates, kraken), sinks. They barely manage to string together a raft from the floating debris, only to find themselves on a (seemingly) deserted island. This scenario is one part survival game, one part ingenuity. What gear did they leave behind on the wreckage? How far out did the ship sink? To make matters more interesting, what if whatever sunk their ship follows them to the island. Without their supplies, can they fight it off? Maybe the island itself is dangerous, full of man-eating flora, and raving cultists (the *Gilligan's Island* scenario also works well for ***Call of Cthuhlu*** style games).

Following these simple steps should help take some of the burden off your shoulders when running a one shot, and allow you to focus on the really important thing . . . telling a great story! Good luck, and happy gaming.

Lens-Men II

Yet More Mini-Character Lenses for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Stephen Dedman

Here are some more 10-point mini-character lenses to help flesh out a character by giving him knowledge in an area of expertise that might not be expected in his current career. Some are based on upbringing, some on college courses, some on hobbies, some on casual jobs, and some may be available as program chips in ultra-tech worlds (Modular Abilities, page 71 of the ***Basic Set***). They can be combined with character templates from the various ***GURPS*** books, allowing characters to fill niches outside of the primary one the template is designed for, such as an investigator with an interest in the occult, or a soldier who can fix radios.

Alternatively, these and other mini-lenses can also be used for quickly generating NPCs for a particular role, and combined to make multi-faceted characters, such as a farmer turned guerilla, or a dockside union boss. You could also create a smaller version of most of these templates for just 5 points simply by cutting the points in the listed skills in half.

Arming Squire

You have gone through an apprenticeship to a medieval (or fantasy) knight as a page and squire, tending to his weapons, his horse, and his other property. This is primarily useful as a lens for a knight (p. 445), but while many knights went through this process, not all squires became knights (even if they survived); a mercenary warrior, merchant, or even a cleric might also have this background (as did the legendary King Arthur, who had been trained as his elder foster-brother's squire). A squire was also expected to learn combat skills by watching his knight and other knights, and to have joined him while hunting.

A serving squire would be 14-21 years old, and have Status 0 and the disadvantages of Duty and Code of Honor (Chivalry). All of these would be optional for a former squire who no longer serves a master.

Skills: Animal Handling (Equine) (A) IQ [2], Armoury/TL3 (A) IQ-1 [1], Falconry (A) IQ-1 [1], First Aid/TL3 (E) IQ [1], Heraldry (A) IQ-1 [1], Housekeeping (E) IQ [1], Savoir-Faire (E) IQ+1 [2].

Dock Worker

You have worked on the docks moving cargo on and off ships or other large vehicles, from ancient Egyptian river barges to interstellar Far Traders. In some settings, this may involve some paperwork or use of heavy machinery; in others, not much more than a strong back is required.

Primary Skill: Lifting (A) HT+1 [4] OR Environment Suit/TL (Exoskeleton) (A) DX+1 [4].

Secondary Traits: Any three from Absolute Timing [2], Administration (A) IQ [2], Crewman/TL (E) IQ+1 [2], Driving/TL (Forklift or Crane) (A) DX [2], Freight Handling/TL (A) IQ [2], Hazardous Materials/TL (A) IQ [2], Knot-Tying (E) DX+1 [2], Lightning Calculator [2], Packing (A) IQ [2], Singing (H) HT-1 [2], Smuggling (A) IQ [2], or Streetwise (A) IQ [2].

Homesteader

You've spent some time working the land. Whether you were a peasant, a farm boy, a survivor of the apocalypse or a colonist (voluntary or involuntary) on a recently terraformed planet, you've learned to make what you need, fix what

you can, and generally do things yourself that city folk would pay someone else to do.

Advantages: Any one from Less Sleep/1 [2], Reduced Consumption/1 [2], or Temperature Tolerance/2 [2].

Primary Skill: Farming (A) IQ+1 [4].

Secondary Skills: Any two from Animal Handling (A) IQ [2], Bioengineering/TL (H) IQ-1 [2], Carpentry (E) IQ+1 [2], Driving/TL (Construction Equipment) (A) DX [2], Leatherworking (E) DX+1 [2], Housekeeping (E) IQ+1 [2], Mechanic/TL (farm machinery) (A) IQ [2], Meteorology/TL (A) IQ [2], Sewing/TL (E) DX+1 [2], or Veterinary/TL (H) IQ-1 [2].

Occultist

You're fascinated by magic. You might not have any magical powers at all (though you may think you do), you might dabble in "hedge magic" or "new age" practices, or you might be vehemently opposed to magic and determined to stamp it out . . . but in any case, you've learned what you can without any formal teaching from real magicians.

Primary Skill: Occultism (A) IQ+1 [4].

Secondary Skills: Any three from Alchemy (VH) IQ-2 [2], Esoteric Medicine (H) Per-1 [2], Exorcism (H) Will-1 [2], Fortune-Telling (A) IQ [2], Research (A) IQ [2], Ritual Magic (VH) IQ-2 [2], Symbol Drawing (H) IQ-1 [2], or Thaumatology (VH) IQ-2 [2].

Partisan

You have defended your homeland against invaders, as a guerilla, spy or saboteur. This would be a good background for someone who wants combat or thief/spy skills without requiring any formal military training. Appropriate disadvantages would include Fanaticism, Obsession, On the Edge, Secret, and Sense of Duty.

Primary Skills: Area Knowledge [2] and one of Acting (A) IQ [2], Fast-Talk (A) IQ [2], Sex-Appeal (A) HT [2], or Stealth (A) DX [2].

Secondary Skills: Three from Bow (A) DX [2], Camouflage (E) IQ+1 [2], Crossbow (E) DX+1 [2], Electronics Operation/TL (Communications or Security Systems) (A) IQ [2], Explosives/TL (Demolition) (A) IQ [2], Filch (A) DX, Garrote (E) DX+1 [2], Guns/TL (any) (E) DX+1 [2], Knife (E) DX+1 [2], Leadership (A) IQ [2], Propaganda/TL (A) IQ [2], Scrounging (E) IQ+1 [2], Streetwise (A) IQ [2], Survival (any) (A) Per [2], Tactics (H) IQ-1 [2], or Traps/TL (A) IQ [2].

Politician

You have experience campaigning for elected office. In some settings, this may be necessary for a position as a sheriff, coroner, public defender or prosecutor, tribal chief, pirate captain, or military officer.

Primary Skill: Politics (A) IQ+1 [4], Public Speaking (A) IQ [2].

Secondary Skills: Two from Administration (A) IQ [2], Area Knowledge (E) IQ+1 [2], Current Affairs (E) IQ+1 [2], Diplomacy (H) IQ-1 [2], Fast-Talk (A) IQ [2], Leadership (A) IQ [2], Propaganda/TL (A) IQ [2], and Savoir-Faire (E) IQ+1 [2].

Prospector

The lure of precious metals and stones has called to you. You may have been caught up in the temporary insanity of a

gold rush, cruised the Trojan points looking for promising M-type asteroids, or just spent your weekends in the desert alone but for a Geiger counter or metal detector.

Primary Skills: Prospecting/TL (A) IQ+1 [4]; Survival (A) Per+1 [4] (or Environment Suit (Vacc Suit) (A) DX [2] and Free Fall (A) DX [2] for a Belter).

Secondary Traits: Acute Vision [2/level] or one of Driving (Off-road vehicle) (A) DX [2], Electronic Operations/TL (Sensors) (A) IQ [2], Geology (H) IQ-1 [2], Holdout (A) IQ [2], Law (Specialization: Mining Rights) (H) IQ-1 [2], Merchant (A) IQ [2], Metallurgy/TL (H) IQ-1 [2], Navigation/TL (A) IQ [2], Packing (A) IQ [2], Piloting/TL (Spacecraft) (A) DX, or Smuggling (A) IQ [2].

Note: For an avid fossil-hunter, simply replace Prospecting with Paleontology; for a rockhound, replace Prospecting with Geology; for a collector of biological specimens, replace Prospecting with Botany, Naturalist, or Zoology.

Scholar

You have studied the seven liberal arts, the trivium and quadrivium, to qualify for a bachelor's degree from a medieval university. This was a prerequisite for a master's degree or doctorate in law, medicine, or theology; it would be a necessary set of background skills for a lawyer or physician in a medieval (Western TL3-4) setting, and would also be appropriate for an alchemist or ivory-tower magical researcher.

Students enrolled in a medieval university also receive a 10-point Legal Immunity advantage, being subject to clerical but not secular law. This lens may be tweaked for fantasy settings (or even post-apocalyptic ones, a la Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*).

Language: Latin, Accented [4]

Skills: Astronomy/TL (Observational) (H) IQ-2 [1], Mathematics/TL (H) IQ-1 [2], Musical composition/TL (H) IQ-2 [1], Philosophy/TL (H) IQ-2 [1], Public Speaking/TL (A) IQ-1 [1].

Sex Worker

You have worked by renting your body or participating in a sexual fantasy -- as a courtesan or prostitute, escort, exotic dancer, phone sex performer, adult entertainment star, rent boy, or bait in a badger game or similar scam. You need not actually have had sex of any sort with anyone, but you've created the illusion that you would be willing to do so. Voice and/or Attractive or better appearance are useful advantages, but by no means obligatory.

Primary Skill: Sex Appeal (A) HT+1 [4].

Secondary Skills: Three from Acting (A) IQ [2], Body Language (A) Per [2], Dancing (A) DX, Disguise (A) IQ [2], Erotic Art (H) DX-1 [2], Makeup/TL (E) IQ+1 [2], Merchant (A) IQ [2], Performance (A) IQ [2], Professional Skill (Courtesan or Prostitute) (A) IQ [2], Psychology (Applied) (H) IQ-1 [2], Savoir-Faire (E) IQ+1 [2], or Streetwise (A) IQ [2].

Techie

You're fascinated by gadgets, especially electronic gadgets, and have a knack for solving hardware problems. You don't have the Gadgeteer advantage, but you've probably built your own ham radio, Geiger counter, computer, bionic ear or T-meter out of mismatched spare parts and a circuit diagram. Appropriate advantages for this lens include High Manual Dexterity; appropriate disadvantages include Curious and Overconfidence.

Primary Skills: Electronics Repair/TL (any) (A) IQ+1 [4], Electronics Operation/TL (any) (A) IQ [2].

Secondary Traits: Two of Acute Vision [2/level], Armoury/TL (Battlesuits or Small Arms) (A) IQ [2], Computer Operation/TL (E) IQ+1 [2], Computer Programming/TL (H) IQ-1 [2], Electrician/TL (A) IQ [2], Engineer/TL (Electronics) (H) IQ-1 [2], Mechanic/TL (any) (A) IQ [2], Photography/TL (A) IQ [2], Physics/TL (VH) IQ-2 [2], or Scrounging (E) Per+1 [2].

Thrillseeker

You've tried your hand at "action sports" such as BASE jumping, buildering, cave diving, extreme skiing, ice climbing, skydiving, or whitewater rafting. This would be a useful background for an adventurer or crimefighter; suitable advantages include High ST, DX and HT, Combat Reflexes, Daredevil, High Pain Threshold, and Rapid Healing. Some level of Overconfidence disadvantage would also be appropriate; most Phobias wouldn't.

Advantage: Fearlessness/1 [2].

Primary Skills: Two of Climbing (A) DX [2], Parachuting (E) DX+1 [2], or Swimming (E) DX+1 [2].

Secondary Skills and Techniques: Two from Acrobatics (H) DX-1 [2], Boating/TL (A) DX [2], First Aid/TL (E) IQ+1 [2], Lifesaving (H) Swimming-4 [2], Piloting/TL (Glider) (A) DX [2], Scaling (H) Climbing-2 [2], Scuba/TL (A) IQ [2], or Skiing (H) HT-1 [2].

Treasure-Hunter

You hunt for valuables that have been lost or stolen -- secret tombs, buried pirate gold, hidden family fortunes, or wrecked merchant vessels. Whether you're an avid amateur archaeologist after antique artwork, or a just a grave-robber greedy for gold, you've probably spent a lot of time listening to legends and deciphering maps covered with mystical glyphs.

Primary Skills: Research (A) IQ [2], Search (A) Per [2].

Secondary Skills: Three from Archaeology (H) IQ-1 [2], Boating/TL (A) DX [2], Cartography/TL (A) IQ [2], Computer Operation/TL (E) IQ+1 [2], Cryptography (H) IQ-1 [2], Expert Skill (Conspiracy Theory) (H) IQ-1 [2], History (H) IQ-1 [2], Literature (H) IQ-1 [2], Merchant (A) IQ [2], Navigation/TL (any) (A) IQ [2], Scuba/TL (A) IQ [2], Streetwise (A) IQ [2], Survival (any), and Traps/TL (A) IQ [2].

Pyramid Review

Toppo

Published by Rio Grande Games

Designed by Reiner Knizia

Art by Christof Tisch

Full-color boxed set with 150 symbol cards & rules (English, French, & German); $17.50

It almost seemed like Rio Grande Games had stopped putting out card games, at least of the small boxed variety a la *Toppo.*

The object of the game is to be the first to run your hand down to fewer than 10 cards.

The players (two to four can play) start the game with a hand of 33 cards apiece. Three more are drawn and placed in the center of the table, and the remainder form a deck from which penalty cards are drawn. The game doesn't use turns; as soon as the "start player" begins laying down his cards, everyone plays as fast as they can.

The cards show one of five different symbols, and the symbols appear in one of five different colors. Each player starts by taking the first three cards from the top of their deck and placing those on the table. Comparing these to the common cards in the middle, if you can match all three in either symbol or color, you can yell "top." The game stops while you place your cards atop those cards. Everyone else must place theirs at the bottom of their deck for later reuse (though you can shuffle your cards at any time).

If a "top" isn't possible, you may match other cards exactly; that is, if both color and symbol match, you may place those on the corresponding cards. Any unmatched cards get taken back into your hand. If at any time someone makes a mistake, he is penalized; this usually amounts to taking back the three cards and taking five new cards from the remainder deck. After each play you must lay down a new line of cards, and try for another match from fresh cards.

When someone has fewer than 10 cards left in his hand, he calls "Toppo." The game ends and that player wins. If you want to play several rounds for points, the losers of the first game get a point for all their remaining cards. If the player called Toppo in error, he gets more penalty cards and play resumes. Whoever has the most points stacked against him may choose to increase the number of cards to be matched; he decides if the next game uses a line of four or five cards instead of just three. After the agreed upon rounds have been played, the player with the fewest penalty points wins.

While brightly colored on both their clear face and their pleasingly designed backs, the materials used are a class or two too thin for such a demanding, turnless game. Would that they had made them as nice as the little plastic tray, which -- unlike too many other card games on the market -- has space enough to fit the whole deck and actually keeps them snug for transport.

The speed of play is cool -- after a market glut it seems as though free-form games like these had all but disappeared -- but this time it may be too much. Any game can take some getting used to, but for this offering there's a pretty mean learning curve. Rather than being frustratingly fun trying to get the rhythms down, it can be just plain annoying trying to maintain a grip on what you're supposed to be doing.

This springs mostly from the rules; they require a few read-throughs, and even then understanding is slow (and the more you read, the less certain you are of the specifics as your eyes blur). Does the game only get interrupted during a

"top," or does it also happen when trying to match? Yes, along with a penalty, but only if you do it wrong. The rest of the time, you're trying to get your plays in before someone else, as much so you don't mush the cards as anything else. And who's looking for your mistakes during the flurry of play? It's a challenge with two, and a madhouse at four. Even an honest player won't notice if he's done something wrong. Everyone takes his cards back regardless of who made a bad play. This isn't stated under "Top"; it's mentioned later in the rules, which makes you backtrack to "Matching" . . . it's a mess.

But what do you expect? The rules instruct you to "scatter all cards, and shuffle them," then "each player takes 33 cards." "Shuffle, then deal" is so outdated. Nowhere in the rules or on the box (or at the product?s web page, for that matter) are you directly told the game's contents -- you simply infer that playing an eight-player game with "a second game set . . . with a total of 300 cards" means you get 150 in each box.

In *Toppo* you?re either playing too fast or not at all. The price tag is about the only thing that offers you justifiable pause.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Horror Rules -- The Simply Horrible Role-Playing Game

Published by [Crucifiction Games](#)

Written by Chris Weedin

Illustrated by Chris Caprile

96-page softcover; $17.99

Horror Rules -- The Simply Horrible Role-Playing Game describes itself as "A Complete (and Completely Different) Horror Comedy RPG," and in many ways, it is. It is complete, it is a horror comedy RPG, but is not completely different. Certainly, plenty of other RPGs have explored the horror movie genre, from Deep7's 1PG *Shriek* to the *Blood Brothers* anthologies for *Call of Cthulhu. Horror Rules* certainly does that, but with its tongue (or someone else's) firmly ensconced in its cheek. Of course, this is a territory previously explored by Stellar Games' very movie-themed *It Came From The Late, Late, Late Show RPG,* but *Horror Rules* bypasses the idea of roleplaying an actor performing in a series of bad B-movies to just game the actual movie and its clichés. And it's all with a simplicity and a knowingness in readiness for both a scare and a laugh.

The simplicity begins with character -- or Good Guy -- generation. Players choose one of six broad Character Types, each with a special ability. For example, the Action Character Type can interrupt an attempt to kill someone in his presence and rush the victim to safety. The Con or Convict can disappear from a dangerous situation to come back when all is safe, or appears to. The Labcoat, once in possession of a specimen from the Bad Guy, can determine its biological abilities and vulnerabilities with a day's study. The Propellorhead can construct a device to emulate particular skills, while the Regular Joe can ignore a single Grip Check (*Horror Rules'* equivalent of the Sanity Check) in an adventure. Finally, the VIP, with access to a working means of communication, can acquire any single item, from welding torch or field kit to zeppelin to clean trousers, no questions asked. These six can easily model any number of occupations. For example, the Ordinary Joe could be a housewife or a convenience store clerk, while the Action type could be a fireman or a Canadian Mountie.

Once a Character Type is chosen, 12 points are divided between four Vital Statistics -- Bulk, Brains, Co-ordination, and Will, each rated between one and five; and another 12 assigned between skills. Rated between one and four, the few broad skills are intended to cover most situations and a player is still free to create his own. Three secondary statistics make up a character's Vital Signs: Health, Grip, and Movement. He also has some necessary little extras. One is a Luck Point, used to guarantee a successful skill check. Another is a Second Thought Point, which allows a player to ask the Rulekeeper or Keeper (as the GM is known) if an idea or course of action is a good one. Finally, a character gets "The Point," literally a single point that can be spent to round him out. Options include improving a Vital Statistic, providing extra skill points, or an extra Luck or Second Thought Point. Another -- more interesting -- option for this point is the Special Trait, of which a character can only have one.

Where other games let a character have advantages and disadvantages, in Horror Rules, a Special Trait gives both! For example, Body Builder gives +2 Bulk, but the character is always attacked first when in a group, while the Deep Faith Special Trait provides a +2 bonus to a group's Faith skill, but its player character does not possess a Luck Point; when push comes to shove, prayer is what will get him out of trouble! All of the Special Traits are well thought out, acting as roleplaying cues as much as they play up to the genre. Over all, character generation is quick and easy, the result being detailed enough to take part in any horror movie.

The mechanics are just as quick and easy. Skill checks require the rolling of a 10-sided die, looking for a roll under

the combination the skill plus its helping Vital Statistic, known as the Target Number; when called for, straight Statistic checks are rolled under double the Vital Statistic. A roll of one or "Break" always succeeds, while a roll of 10 -- a Flub -- always fails. The Keeper is expected to exercise his imagination for both Breaks and Flubs, but tables are included for both Skill Check and Combat Flubs.

Combat uses the same mechanics, with the result of the roll influencing the damage inflicted: The lower the roll, the better the result. For example, rolling exactly the Target Number, a Glancing Blow, inflicts half of a weapon's damage value. Below that is a Solid Hit, worth the full damage, and a combat Break is a critical hit and can a character or Bad Guy straight off. Against the Good Guys, Critical Hit damage is deducted from a randomly determined Vital Statistic! On a Bad Guy, Critical Hits target his Weak Spot, really hurting it or even killing it. When a Good Guy's Health or a Vital Statistic is reduced to zero, he is all but dead, but a Bad Guy experiences "Degrees of Death," meaning that the Good Guys are never quite sure when said Bad Guy is really, really dead.

This being a horror game, it has rules for getting frightened and pants-wetting. Well not quite . . . Essentially, the Keeper determines how frightening the situation is and the player rolls against it. The price of failure is the loss of both Grip points (double if you roll a Flub) and suffering a Panic Reaction. "Losing Your Grip" -- or all of your Grip points -- means that things have gone from bad to worse for the players. At the very least, the character is in trouser-wetting country again, but phobias, Panic Attacks, and Going Postal are further possible reactions. In general, the Grip rules tend towards the extreme, but then they are modeling a sub-genre unknown for its subtlety. A working example of them in play would have helped, but *Horror Rules* is hardly a complex game.

Where the fun really starts is in the Rulekeeper's two chapters, both of which are engagingly and entertainingly written, showcasing the author's knowledge and appreciation of the genre. His advice has an "in ya face" quality, such as going for cheap scares if possible, and if there happen to be Plot Flaws in the story, then keep 'em! And whatever you do, never try to explain them, retract them, or paper them over. In other words, use them and other tricks to keep the players on their toes. One rule with this entertainment potential that will encourage in-genre play is for "Stupid Thing Points." These are earned when a player does something obviously idiotic, but in-genre. Accrue three Stupid Thing Points, and a player can exchange them for another Luck Point or Second Thought Point.

Several different styles of play are suggested and discussed such as having a cut off point after which no new characters can join the adventure or only having killed off characters replaced by "Walk-Ons" or NPCs. Characters can be a step above the ordinary and be "Stars," possessing the bonus of an extra The Point during character generation. Alternatively, in "Friends Like These," the game becomes one of player versus player! The aim is to be the last man standing, but everyone must still cooperate to survive until the very end. Luck Points and Second Thought Points become the reverse, Bad Luck Points and No Thought Points that are instead played on opponents rather your own character!

The advice on script writing is less interesting, but reasonable enough. The Rulekeeper's chapters come with a selection of ready-to-face Bad Guys. The short list includes the ever traditional Axe-Wielding Homicidal Maniac, Vampire, Werewolf, and Zombie, but adds more interesting and entertaining creatures such as The Creature From The Crapper and the Giant Invisible Mutant Spider. The latter is completely illustrated, but it is not as if you can see it! Finally, the book is rounded off with "A Walk In The Woods," a short scenario or script that should provide an evening's entertainment.

Physically, *Horror Rules* is less than effective, mostly due to the poorly handled artwork. It should have been presented in black and white, not grayscale, as this makes the book look grubby. That said, the style is very much tongue-in-cheek. Otherwise, the layout does the job that it should without being unremarkable.

The first impression of *Horror Rules* suggests that it is not a little dumb, and there is certainly a truth in that. But this is dumb fun, and that is the point of the game. Everyone needs a little stupidity in gaming now and then, and *Horror Rules* shows how it can be done with a knowing intelligence. *Horror Rules -- The Simply Horrible Role-Playing Game* is there for when you want a less than serious alternative for your horror, and this it serves up with relish. Your choice of flavor, of course . . .

--Matthew Pook

The Call To Adventure Can Be Faint (Part II)

Last week we were talking about [minimal motivation](#) -- the art of trying to use as small a motivational force as possible to get the heroes (and their players) interested in joining the adventure.

If you want to try your hand at working minimal motivation into your campaign, I recommend the following:

Know the players' characters. Obviously that's much easier if the players have made their characters knowable and known. By understanding what's really important to the characters, it makes it easier to build something subtle. So if you know that one hero is motivated by a desire to look for his missing sister, then you can use that as a foundation for a minimal plot.

(As an aside, in the case of missing sister thread, I'd probably ask the player how long he expected that storyline to last should it ever be brought up. Does he see the character finding the sister in the first few adventures, never finding her, or somewhere in between?)

Know the players (if possible). This one is obviously much tougher, and is easier if you're gaming with a group of friends than folks you meet for the first time at a con table. By knowing what motivates the players, it can be easier to find something that will motivate the player *and* character.

In the case of my ***Dark Ages*** soul-less child scenario, I knew that the player *and* character were both suckers for sob stories, and were unlikely to deny a request for an official request for an audience. Furthermore, I knew that the other player -- who was studying to be a lawyer -- may well be interested in the details of the mysterious unseen contract the boy signed.

Let's expand our earlier example. Say that you know that the sister-seeking character's player is very sensitive to smells and enjoys in-game shopping expeditions and long walks on the beach (err, just kidding about the beach thing). Anyway, in this case it might be enough, in the midst of a busy bazaar scenario, to mention that the character catches what he believes to be the briefest whiff of the unique perfume his sister wore. If the player takes the hook and starts investigating, then he's done so on nothing more than a little-used sense in passing in an otherwise unremarkable scene.

Try to understand the group dynamics (both in and out of character). Again, this one can be difficult if you aren't closely tied to the gaming group, but it might still be possible. Basically, one problem with minimal motivations -- especially those targeting one PC -- is that there might be little motivation for the rest of the group to tag along. "Why should I care if you thought you smelled your sister's perfume?" is a reasonable query; "How does that get me phat l00t?"

By having an understanding of the way that the group interacts, you might be able to figure out how likely a minimal motivation for one character will be enough to get the rest of the group to go along. Depending on the group, the other players' characters may well need their own motivation, up to and including the character cajoling or bribing the others to come along.

Having players with multiple groups of characters (as I've discussed [before](#)) can also be a good technique to use here; if the minimally motivated PC has the means of getting just *one* character each from the rest of the players to tag along, then that's all that's necessary for the plot to continue apace. And, if you're using my multiple group method, then it might even be possible for that one character to go off alone without fear that he'll be monopolizing all the game time.

To use an easy continuation of our lost sister scenario, if you know that the perfume-smelling character is usually the party leader, then he should have enough pull all by himself to get the rest of the gang in line. If that PC wasn't the leader, it might be necessary to recalibrate the "clue" to something stronger, thus ensuring the character puts more oomph (if possible) into the negotiations.

Try to understand how much your core plot can be pared down to. For example, the classic real-life techo-thriller *The Cuckoo's Egg* begins with the author being asked by his supervisor to track down a $0.75 accounting error in their software and ended up with him tracking down a hacker who was attempting to steal nuclear secrets. In this case, sure the adventure could begin with the GM telling the compu-wiz PC that the Army's computers have been shut down by agents unknown. But -- if it's the compu-wiz duty to investigate -- then a $0.75 error on his own system is just as likely to get the player unwinding that ball of yarn . . . and hopefully the eventual unraveling will be that much more sastisfying.

Just because the motivational hook is small doesn't mean the adventure needs to be slow-paced. It may be tempting to think that a minimal motivation needs to lead to a slightly bigger one, leading to a slightly bigger one, and so on, taking many many game-hours to get going. In reality, this doesn't need to be the case (although it can be if the players are interested enough). For example, the scene with the soul-stolen peasant boy took maybe 30 minutes, and by the time it was concluded the players had all the ammunition they needed to begin rallying the troops in full furvor. Sure, the onion *can* take a while to unlayer, but it's just as likely for the players to pull out a sword and chop the onion in half (metaphorically speaking).

Be prepared for the thread to be dropped. Finally, one thing *always* to keep in mind with minimal motivation is that the characters (and players) are entirely likely -- indeed, it should almost be expected -- for them not to pick up the ball and run. After all, if the point of this technique is to be subtle, then sometimes the subtle clues are going to get missed. This was what happened with the *Aberrant* campaign I mentioned last issue; the players missed the (literally) microscopic clue I planted for them, and so I went with my Plan B adventure.

As a GM, you have no recourse if a minimal motivational force isn't picked up and used by the players; I sure hope you had a different means of getting the adventure on track or, even better, a different adventure altogether in mind. (After all, if you reintroduce a plot an adventure or two later, there are two possibilities: Either the players won't remember the earlier reference and treat this introduction as a new opportunity, or else they *will* remember the earlier iteration and think, "Whoa, cool!" If there's no time for the players to reflect, you're quite possibly ramming the plot down their throat; if they *do* have that chance, then it's foreshadowing, which is pretty neat.

Fortunately, in the case of my *Dark Ages* diabolist plot, I was fully prepared for a full-scale attack in Act II if the clues weren't picked up in the previous act. You can always go from monogrammed hankie to blood-stained corpse in the barn; it's harder to go the other way around.

Getting the PCs motivated is one of the most important tasks the GM has for any adventure. Getting them motivated *without* pulling out the big guns every time is almost a necessity for a long-running campaign. Remember: It can be much more satisfying to fall down the rabbit hole when you're chasing the rabbit, rather than the other way around.

--Steven Marsh

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Best Served Cold

for *d20 System*

by Michael Tresca

With the preponderance of *raise dead* and *resurrection* spells in most **d20 System** fantasy campaigns, death is a temporary obstacle at best. The implications of a society where death isn't permanent leads to the question: What's the first thing you do after you die?

Kill the one who killed you, of course.

The urge to get revenge on someone or something comes naturally to characters. After all, they entered a violent situation and probably died violently. But the world becomes a much more dangerous place when arch-villains, intelligent monsters, and even common NPCs all decided to get revenge on the player characters.

Reasons for Vengeance

There are plenty of reasons to get angry at characters, not the least of which is death. But there are a wide range of possibilities in between. Spell casters in particular have the capacity to do a tremendous amount of damage to the surrounding countryside. One stray *fire* spell can ignite an entire farmland; one druid casting a *control weather* spell can change the very climate. If a farmer is expecting a dry season and rainfall destroys his crops, his livelihood might be at stake. If that farmer is indentured to a noble, the noble might have something to say about the unintended destruction as well.

Of course, not all vengeance happens by direct conflict. If it did, the world would be a much simpler place. Instead, less powerful characters will do everything they can to bring the player characters down, from slander to sabotage.

The Tools of Vengeance

There are plenty of means that characters can used to exact vengeance. Here are a few ways skills can be used as tools to get revenge.

Appraise

Merchants who are angered by a character's actions will artificially inflate prices. They might even intentionally devaluate a character's valuables, spreading rumors about them being stolen, cursed, or otherwise undesirable.

Bluff

Lying to the character is an obvious means of getting revenge. Sometimes disinformation is far more deadly than a crossbow bolt. Commoners might give the wrong directions to a dungeon, or -- as Gollum did -- lead the characters right into a more powerful monsters lair.

Feign Knowledge: Bluff can be used to fake Knowledge checks. In this case, 5 ranks in a particular Knowledge skill gives a +2 synergy bonus to the Bluff; the more the expert knows what hes talking about, the more believable the lie.

Craft

If merchants can intentionally under- or over-value an item, craftsmen can inflict even more damage by intentionally crafting cheap goods. Imagine a characters surprise when his trusty shield breaks in half!

Pass Off Shoddy Workmanship: To pass off shoddy workmanship, the crafter must fail his Craft check by 1: good enough to look usable, but not actually functional. Characters shopping for the item must make an Appraise check, opposed by the Craft check, to determine that the object in question is faulty. Intentionally sabotaged items in this fashion have half their hardness and hit points. Alchemical items simply fail to work.

Diplomacy

Ah, slander. The coward's weapon, wielded from afar and often without any means of tracking the slander back to its source. By making Diplomacy checks, the vengeful can turn a town's population against the characters before they even arrive.

Slander: Slandering someone requires an opposed Diplomacy check between the character being slandered and the slanderer. The DM should make this roll secretly. If the PC fails the check, people believe the slander about him and their attitude is reduced by one step.

Disguise

Slander is one thing, but causing villainous acts in the name of your hated foe really takes the vengeance cake. Why claim that a paladin is actually a drunkard, when townsfolk can watch said paladin stumble across the town square with bottle in hand, howling at the moon? Since Disguise checks are much more difficult when the target is relatively well known, this tactic is most effective against characters who are new to town. Smart avengers could one step ahead of the characters and perform a reputation-ruining incident before they arrive.

Forgery

The law is a tool that often tries to protect characters from impulsive acts of vengeance. However, that tool can be twisted in horrible ways to put the characters in deep trouble with the local government.

Government decrees and military orders bestow a +8 bonus to Forgery checks. That can include everything from an order for arrest, an edict meant to embarrass ("Thurold cannot be within fifty feet of chickens after the incident"), or a death warrant.

Handle Animal

Animals, by nature, are not vengeful beasts. They generally do what they're trained to do. This is why an animal can be particularly vexing if it's trained to do exactly the opposite of what a character expects it to do. The most obvious choices are mounts; Horses and donkeys can be stubborn enough without training.

Essentially, a vengeful owner sells the creatures to the characters as being trained, but the command is actually the reverse. Thus, Fetch becomes Stay, Defend becomes Down, etc. It takes an opposed Wild Empathy or Handle Animal check to figure out what's going on.

Heal

Everybody can be bribed, including healers. Healers who are out for vengeance can stretch out the healing so it takes longer, perhaps to keep the characters delayed for a period.

Impair Recovery: On a successful Heal check (DC 20), the healer can actually make the characters wounds worse, blaming infection. The character heals only half of his usual rest. An opposed Heal or Sense Motive check detects the ruse.

Perform

There's a rule that most city-dwellers learn within the first few days of arriving: Never tick off the talent. Performers can make the most heroic characters look like complete fools in a public forum. Satire, biting comedic rants, poetry and song that belittles the characters; there's no armor that can save a character from a performer's attack.

Satire: This form of slander is just as bad as a Diplomacy check. The performer can make an opposed Perform check against citizens Diplomacy to influence their opinion of a character. With a roll of 25 or more, the whole town is affected.

Sleight of Hand

Sleight of hand can be used to palm things on your person as well as steal something from someone. But if the vengeful type is really in a black mood, it can be used to plant something incriminating on a character.

Plant Object: If you try to plant something on another creature, you must make a DC 20 Sleight of Hand check to plant it. The opponent makes a Spot check to detect the attempt, opposed by the same Sleight of Hand check result you achieved when you tried to plant the item. An opponent who succeeds on this check notices the attempt, regardless of whether the item was successfully planted.

Survival

In the theater, one should never tick off performers, who will satirize you to no end. In the city, one should never tick off the servants, who just might spit in your food. In the wilderness, never, ever upset your guide, or you may find yourself without supplies in the middle of a desert.

Lose a Party: On a DC 15 Survival check, the guide gets his companions lost. The victim makes a Survival or Knowledge (geography) check to detect the ruse, opposed by the same Survival check result the guide achieved when he tried to lose his companions. A victim that succeeds on this check notices the attempt, regardless of whether the guide succeeded in getting everyone lost.

Vengeful Classes

Just about any class can become vengeful, especially after being murdered. Consider these substitution levels for each class. Theres just one requirement to join these classes: the character must have been killed and brought back from the dead. Even undead can take these classes.

The definition of the target of vengeance varies from character to character. A class with a narrow focus of vengeance, which would be one person, provides bonuses only to get revenge against that person. With such a limited scope, the class abilities tend to be much more powerful. Conversely, a wronged character with a broad scope of vengeance -- such as against a particular organization, guild, nation, or race -- has less powerful abilities. The DM has the final say on what constitutes broad or limited targets of vengeance.

Seething Barbarian

Level	Ability
1	Vengeful Rage
4	Vengeful Rage 2/day
7	Unstoppable Revenge 1/-
8	Vengeful Rage 3/day
10	Unstoppable Revenge 2/-
12	Vengeful Rage 4/day, trap sense +4

13	Unstoppable Revenge 3/-
14	Vengeful Will
16	Unstoppable Revenge 4/-, Vengeful Rage 5/day
18	Unstoppable Revenge 5/-
20	Mighty rage, Vengeful Rage 6/day

Vengeful Rage (Ex)

This power works like a barbarian's rage, except that it bestows an additional +1 morale bonus to attack and damage against the target of his vengeance. If the barbarian has a narrow scope of vengeance, this bonus rises to +2.

Unstoppable Revenge (Ex)

This power works like a barbarians damage reduction, except that it bestows an additional +1 morale bonus to Armor Class against the target of his vengeance. If the barbarian has a narrow scope of vengeance, this bonus rises to +2.

Satirist

Level	Ability
1	Mock Opponent -1
3	Mock Competence
8	Mock Opponent -2
14	Mock Opponent -3
15	Satirize
20	Mock Opponent -4

Mock Opponent (Su)

A bard with 3 or more ranks in a Perform skill can use song or poetics to mock the targets of his vengeance, weakening them against fear and reducing their combat abilities. To be affected, the target must be able to hear the bard sing. The effect lasts for as long as the target hears the bard sing and for 5 rounds thereafter. An affected ally receives a 1 morale penalty on saving throws against charm and fear effects and a -1 morale penalty on attack and weapon damage rolls. At 8th level, and every six bard levels thereafter, this penalty increases by 1 (-2 at 8th, -3 at 14th, and -4 at 20th). Mock opponent is a mind-affecting ability.

Mock Incompetence (Su)

A bard of 3rd level or higher with 6 or more ranks in a Perform skill can use his music or poetics to help the target of his vengeance fail at a task. The target must be within 30 feet and able to see and hear the bard. The bard must also be able to see the target.

The ally gets a -2 morale penalty on skill checks with a particular skill as long as he continues to hear the bard's music. Certain uses of this ability are infeasible. The effect lasts as long as the bard concentrates, up to a maximum of 2 minutes. Mock incompetence is a mind-affecting ability.

Satirize (Su)

A bard of 15th level or higher with 18 or more ranks in a Perform skill can use music or poetics to satirize the mightiest of heroes, harming the targets of his vengeance within 30 feet. For every three bard levels the character attains beyond 15th, he can satirize one additional creature. To satirize, a bard must sing and the target must hear the bard sing for a full round. A creature so satirized suffers a -4 morale penalty on saving throws and a -4 morale penalty to AC. The effect lasts for as long as the target hears the bard sing and for up to 5 rounds thereafter. Satirize is a mind-

affecting ability.

Vengeance Domain

Clerics can take the vengeance domain.

Granted Powers

You gain the smite power, the supernatural ability to make a single melee attack against a target of your vengeance with a +4 bonus on attack rolls and a bonus on damage rolls equal to your cleric level (if you hit). You must declare the smite before making the attack. This ability is usable once per day with a broad focus of vengeance and twice per day for a narrow focus of vengeance.

Vengeance Domain Spells

1. Zone of Truth
2. Detect Thoughts
3. Locate Creature
4. Mark of Justice
5. Scrying
6. Find the Path
7. Scrying, Greater
8. Discern Location
9. Storm of Vengeance

Nature's Wrath

Unlike the other classes, druids are the most likely to want revenge for defense of a place as opposed to their own personal well being. Destruction of a sacred grove or desecration of a holy spring will bring about the druid's wrath.

Level	Ability
3	Vengeful Path
20	Storm of Vengeance

Vengeful Path (Su)

At will, the druid can use the equivalent of a *find the path* spell to track the target of her vengeance.

Storm of Vengeance (Su)

Once per day, the druid can summon a storm of vengeance against targets of her vengeance.

Avenging Paladin

Whereas the cleric might follow an ethos of revenge and seeks out those who do likewise, the paladin is an avenger; he avenges those who have been wronged. Thus, a paladin must commit to avenge someone else and defines his vengeance scope through others.

Level	Ability
1	Aura of Good, Avenging Smite
3	Aura of Vengeance, Divine Health
5	Avenging Smite 2/day, Special Mount

10	Avenging Smite 3/day
15	Avenging Smite 4/day
20	Avenging Smite 5/day

Zone of Truth (Sp)

Once per day, a paladin can use zone of truth, as the spell, against targets of his patrons vengeance.

Avenging Smite (Su)

Once per day, a paladin may attempt to smite a target of her vengeance with one normal melee attack. She adds her Charisma bonus (if any) to her attack roll and deals 1 extra point of damage per paladin level. If the paladin accidentally smites a creature that is not a target of her vengeance, the smite has no effect, but the ability is still used up for that day. At 5th level, and at every five levels thereafter, the paladin may make an avenging smite one additional time per day, as indicated on the table, to a maximum of five times per day at 20th level.

Aura of Vengeance (Su)

Beginning at 3rd level, a paladin is immune to fear (magical or otherwise) from targets of his vengeance. Each target of vengeance within 10 feet of him suffers a -4 morale penalty on saving throws against fear effects. This ability functions while the paladin is conscious, but not if he is unconscious or dead.

Vengeful Ranger

Of all the classes best suited for vengeance, rangers make especially good avengers. Their abilities are targeted to a broad group of enemies already.

Level	Ability
1	Target of Revenge +2
5	Target of Revenge +4
10	Target of Revenge +6
15	Target of Revenge +8
20	Target of Revenge +10

Target of Revenge (Ex)

At 1st level, a ranger selects his target of revenge. The ranger gains a +2 morale bonus on Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot, and Survival checks when using these skills against these targets if they are a broad group. Likewise, he gets a +2 morale bonus on weapon damage rolls against such a group. At 5th level and every five levels thereafter (10th, 15th, and 20th level), the bonus increases by 2. If the target of revenge is a narrow group, the ranger gets an additional +1 morale bonus on attack rolls (increase by 1 for every five levels thereafter).

Vengeful Rogue

Rogues, like rangers, are well suited to stabbing people in the back for real and imagined wrongs.

Level	Ability
10	Vengeance Ability +1
13	Sneak attack +7d6, Vengeance Ability +2
16	Vengeance Ability +3
19	Sneak attack +10d6, Vengeance Ability +4

Vengeance Ability (Ex)

When choosing any one of the rogue special abilities, the vengeful rogue receives a +1 morale bonus to all Reflex saving throws and skill checks made in conjunction with those special abilities. If the target of vengeance is a narrow focus, the rogue gets an additional roll if he fails his first use of the special ability against the target of his vengeance.

Feats

These feats can be used to start a form of revengeor end it.

Einvigi

You are an expert at settling old scores.

Requisites: BAB +1, you must have settled a feud with someone by killing them.

Benefits: When calling out a target of vengeance, you receive a +1 morale bonus to attack and damage. This opponent must have wronged you in some way. You only receive this bonus if you fight your opponent in one-on-one combat and he is adequately prepared for the duel.

Holmgang

When you settle scores, you bind your opponent by divine right to accept the consequences of the outcome.

Requisites: BAB +6, Knowledge (Religion) 6 ranks.

Benefits: You must call out the target of vengeance. The target must make a Will save (DC 10 + your character level). Failure means the target is affected as if by a *geas/quest* spell. Once the target of vengeance fights in a duel with the character, regardless of the outcome, the effects of the holmgang are lifted and the feat cannot be used against him again.

Katakiuchi

Katakiuchi is a legal vendetta in orderly societies. You are familiar with its terms.

Requisites: Must be lawful in alignment, +3 base attack bonus

Benefits: The avenger receives a +1 morale bonus to Diplomacy and Gather Information checks in lawful societies that recognize the right of katakiuchi in conjunction with his quest to avenge himself.

Normal: There are strict rules for conducting a katakiuchi. The avenger must be of equal or lower social status than the target of his vengeance and must legally register his intent with his lord; he may not return home without proof of his success. Upon receiving a legal approval, the avenger then carries the document with all relevant information and presents it to officials as appropriate, especially after the target of vengeance is killed. This documents exempts the avenger from all legal ramifications for his revenge. This feat usually applies to a narrow group, but can also be applied to a broad group, called a fukushu.

Stopping the Cycle

Some civilized societies recognize vengeance as a legitimate form of reparation (see katakiuchi, above). As a result, it is also possible to make reparations for murder. In the case of a fantasy universe where death is fleeting, entire societies might be in danger of collapse as two perpetually resurrected foes kill each other in an ever-escalating death

match.

Called wergild, ericfine, galanas, or glowczyzna, this reparation is usually sufficient to cover the expenses of the persons loss to his family or employer. As a general rule, the cost is 1,000 gold pieces per effective character level of the target. Thus, if a killer hopes to avoid vengeance, he must pay the price. Once the gold is paid and accepted, all feats related to vengeance from that person or persons are invalidated; he can no longer be considered a target of vengeance. Note that for broad groups of vengeance, the cost may be considerably higher.

Once Avenged

Characters with a narrow focus of their vengeance will eventually kill or be killed. Upon doing so, they must consider what to do next. They may choose to use their vengeance on behalf of someone else. Alternately, the vengeance doesn't have to be so personal; at the DM's option, a vengeful character might swear to avenge a friend, family member, or spouse. Alternately, some characters will never truly eliminate the target of their vengeance because the scope of their vengeance is so broad. Those that do may end up committing genocide, in turn incurring vengeance against the avenger.

Icosahedron Adventures

Bigger Is Better

by Owen K.C. Stephens

Getting Big: The Giant Character Class

One of the core design ideas behind the *d20 System* is to break things with game mechanical similarities into broad categories and sub-categories. This organization allows game mechanics to be built around these categories (which also include spell schools, descriptors, sub-types, and bonus types) giving consistent, easily-explained benefits and penalties. Thus red dragons and wyverns aren't just similar, they're both of the dragon type. This means they have certain features in common as defined by their type, and that spells or magic properties effective only against dragons work on them, but not hydras.

However, little is done with these categories other than to refer to them. Adding new categories is often avoided because of the effect it can have on game play (if a spell is allowed to access a new energy type -- base rather than acid for example -- it weakens the value of defensive effects by expanding the number of attack types and thus reducing the chance a given resistance is useful against a given attack). But the tight interconnection of the game categories can also be used to make sweeping changes to game play or design without interfering with other elements of gameplay. For example, a GM who wished magic to carry more consequences could rule that all spells with the Fire descriptor catch dry material on fire, and all those with the Acid descriptor create noxious fumes. Thus the GM need not go through every spell in the campaign to assign such effects, knowing that all appropriate spells already have those tags.

Within each category things become much less organized. For example, although all creatures of one type have some things in common (base hit die, good saving throw categories, skill points), a great deal of information is generated ad hoc within each monster entry. The most critical value that has no set method for determining it is the challenge rating of a creature, which determines what adventurers it's licensed to go after, how much money it has, and how much you learn by killing it. This critical number is given for every monster, but a GM wishing to create his own threats is left with no choice but to slap on class levels (which don't always stack perfectly with the CR they generate), or create a new monster and compare its powers to those of various CRs.

There is no reason why this is necessary, especially not under the current fantasy *d20 System* rules. Monsters have all the same statistics as classed characters. If a "character class" were to be written for each monster type, along with a +0 ECL base race, it would be possible to write up a monster from scratch and know its CR easily (as one level of a heroic class grants +1CR to any ECL +0 race). The class could be used anywhere a creature of that type was needed, or be stacked onto existing creatures to give them greater power appropriate to creatures of that type.

Of course there are pitfalls to any attempt to turn a vast collection of vaguely-similar creatures into a single chart. With aberrations and undead it may well be impossible, or at least produce a less universally applicable result. To test the basic theory that a "type" class can be used to supplement or replace existing monsters this article presents the giant class. Giants are iconic and popular, but lack the widely varied powers of many other types. In short, a giant class is easier than a dragon or magical beast class would be, and is thus a god place to start with such an idea.

What Do I Do With This?

There are three ways to use the giant class. The class may be restricted to creatures already of the giant type, and used as a quick and easy way to increase the CR of a giant foe. Each level of giant class taken by a giant increases his CR by one, and gives the increase in attack bonus, saving throws, hit points and special abilities to compete with higher-

level PCs. This option allows giants to be more than just big barbarians or fighters, although even with some magic powers included as options a giant seeking powerful spellcasting abilities is better off taking a traditional heroic character class.

Alternatively, the giant class can be used as a giant-monster generator. In this case the giant core race (presented below) is used as a starting point, and as many levels of the giant class are added as needed to reach the desired CR (like any core class, each level of giant class increases a character's CR by one). This allows a GM to create a wide variety of giant monsters and always know what the CR of each is without guess or using trial-and-error comparisons to existing monsters. If the giant is to be used as a monster, it gains a monster bonus based on the number of giant levels it has (see below). Once a core giant race is created, individuals may take heroic class levels as desired.

Third, it can be given as an option for any character to represent giantish blood somewhere in the character's ancestry. A GM may require a character to take a feat to qualify for the giant class (such as Giantblooded, presented below), or all characters may be allowed to declare a single type other than humanoid that represents a trace of unusual heritage. Characters that choose giant as their heritage type may take levels in the giant class as they would any other character class.

Giantblooded [General]

You have the blood of giants in your veins, and their influence shows on your physical form.

Prerequisites: Str 15+, Dexterity 13 or less.

Benefits: You receive a +2 size bonus to grapple checks and any maneuver where creatures of a larger size category receive a bonus. Your actual size class does not change, you're just big and bulky enough to gain a benefit over creatures within your own size category, and to minimize the advantage gained by creatures of larger size.

Also, you count as being of the giant type for purposed of being allowed to take an action (such as wielding a sword on giants may hold or taking level of the giant class), but not for purposes of things not working on or for you (weapons that are bane vs giants gain no extra bonus against you, a *charm person* still works on your if you're a humanoid).

Monster Bonus

In standard ***d20 Fantasy*** rules, a fair portion of a character's power is from the items he carries. A progression of the expected level of special and magical gear a character should have keeps NPCs using standard classes and levels in line with the power level of monsters of the same CR. This is important, because monsters gear (also known as "treasure") is a lower total value at any given CR, and more of it is likely to be in the form of coins and gems (pretty and functional, but not of much use in a typical fight). An NPC's gear at any given level is roughly three times the value of the treasure of a monster of the same CR. Thus a giant built using the giant class and gear totals of an NPC of his level ends up with more equipment than a giant class built as a monster, but the two are expected to be of the same CR.

Of course one answer would be to have monsters carry the same value and type of gear as NPCs, but this method has a few drawbacks. First, it requires the GM spend considerably more time to spend all the money of every giant. Second, items purchased must be of significant use to the giant class NPC, or his CR lags. Third, it increases the treasure PCs get for defeating giants. However, if monster-style giants are given treasure for their EL, rather than their NPC level, they don't pose as much of a challenge for their CR (negating one of the primary benefits of using the giant class).

To balance this apparent inequity, a giant class built as a "monster" gains one or more bonus options. Player characters never receive the monster bonus, as they gain money (and thus gear) at the same rate as any other PC (and normally end up with much more than NPCs of any description). These bonus options are all things that are common among monsters, but would be unbalancing in the hands of a player character. (If as GM really wants to create monster-style

giants with this system, and allow them as cohorts or PCs, each monster bonus gained gives the creature a +1 ECL.)

Monster-built giants gain one monster bonus every odd level. Monster bonuses may not be selected more than once unless they specify otherwise. A bonus racial feat can always be taken in place of a monster bonus, though the giant must meet all its normal qualifications. A giant class character built with monster bonuses carries gear in the form of treasure appropriate to the EL it is encountered in, not NPC gear values.

Monstrous Ability: You gain a constant innate ability. The ability works as a spell you select of a level no more than half your giant class levels. The spell must have a range of personal or touch, and can not increase you armor class, attack bonus, damage output, or ability scores. Examples include the storm giant's *freedom of movement* and the ogre mage's *fly*. You may select this monster bonus more than once, but it may not account for more than one third of your monster bonuses.

Monstrous Healing: If you have the fast healing or regeneration giant powers, they work even when you are above 50% of your hit point total.

Monstrous Power: You gain a bonus giant power (from the giant class, see below).

Monstrous Rend: If you have natural claw attacks, and you hit with both in the same round on the same target, you receive a free rend attack on that target. The rend automatically hits and deals double your claw damage.

Monstrous Spell Resistance: You gain spell resistance equal to your giant class levels +5. You may take this a second time, granting you +5 to your total spell resistance. This may not account for more than half you total monstrous bonuses.

Monstrous Spellcasting: You cast spells as if you were a 1st-level sorcerer or druid. You may take this more than once, each time increasing your spellcasting by one level, but it may never account for more than half of your monster bonuses.

Monstrous Strength: You have a +2 racial bonus to Strength. This may be taken more than once, but can not account for more than half your total monster bonuses.

Core Giant Race

If the giant class is to be used to generate giants of all type, the core giant race should be used as the racial basis such monsters. The core giant race can also be used as a player-character race if the GM wants a reasonable ECL +0 option for a Large race. In either case specifics of lifespan, exact height and weight, culture, and social structure can be crafted to give exactly the type of giants desired. There is no reason these details need to be uniform among giants. When using the core giant race to build a fire giant you can assume dark coloration, heavy frames, and foul tempers, while jungle giants can be thin for their size and calm. Such details need not have game mechanics to support them, leaving the GM free to have as many different types of giants as is desired without having multiple sets of rules to deal with.

Alternatively a GM *may* decide that all giants are, in fact, members of the same race which grows in ability as it ages (and even physically gets bigger). Under this scheme, a hill giant is simply a dumb, uncivilized giant who never gains the grace and magic abilities of his more civilized brethren, while a storm giant is an ancient patriarch of a noble, advanced civilization. This presents a world where distinctions such as "fire giant" and "ogre" are no more than artificial labels created by non-giants who don't understand the innately magical nature of the giant species.

If using the core giant race as the basis for creating a new race of giants (as opposed to creating a player character-type race), be sure to use the "standard array" of ability scores. Although the ability scores given for monsters are supposedly for a "typical" member of the race (the equivalent to a human with straight 10s), it seems much more reasonable to assume a typical monster uses the same array as a typical NPC. The standard array is 15, 14, 13, 12, 10, 8. Most giants should place the 15 in Strength, the 14 in Constitution, and the 10 or 8 in Dexterity.

Ability scores. Giants receive +2 Strength, +2 Constitution, and -2 Dexterity. Giants are big, tough and strong, but not very fast or agile.

Giant type. Core giants are of the giant type, meaning effects that only work on humanoids (such as *charm person*) have no effect on them.

Large. Core giants are Large size. This means they use Large weapons, armor and equipment, take a -1 size penalty to attack rolls and armor class, have a 10 ft. space and natural reach, take a -4 size penalty to Hide checks, gain a +4 size bonus to grapple checks, and have double the normal carrying capacity for your Strength score.

Movement rate. Core giants have a 40 ft. base move rate.

Low-Light Vision. Core giants have low-light vision, allowing them to see twice as far in shadowy or dim conditions than a human.

Throwing. Core giants receive a +1 racial bonus on all attack rolls with thrown weapons.

Favored Class. A core giant may select barbarian, cleric or fighter as favored class at character creation. All giants also receive the giant class as a favored class.

Giant Class

" Fee, fi, fo, fum..."
Attributed to a giant coinsmith and poultry farmer.

As foes giants are classic bad guys, enjoying advantages of reach and size that makes defeating them in melee punishing, and keeping far enough back to stay out of melee difficult. Giants have all the advantages of humanoids, able to use weapons and equipment, cast spells, and adapt to their situations in way creatures without thumbs just can't manage. They range from single threats wandering through forests and mountains to whole nations of oversized adversaries, able to field titanic armies even high-level PCs take pause at confronting.

As a player character, the giant takes its place beside the barbarian and fighter as a front-line combatant able to deal punishing blows. The giant can't take all the damage it dishes out and is terrible at missions requiring stealth however, forcing it to work more closely with allies than most fighting-class characters. The giant is also in constant need of money as its food, steed, weapons and armor all cost more (especially if some special material, such as adamantine, is desired in the construction). Indeed, this very drive for money may be the cause of the giant's racial reputation as greedy and selfish.

Giants of all kinds are defined primarily by their size and Strength. A Large giant can often carry more than a pack animal, and a Huge giant has the ability to be a walking marketplace. This is especially true since many giants wear heavy armor, and thus have no particular need to stay in light encumbrance. As a result giants are often willing to carry random bits of gear and even junk found during an adventure, which sometimes gives them options less laden characters lack.

Making a Giant

Although their 2/3 attack progression may seem to limit giant's abilities in combat, they are in fact primarily melee fighters. Their massive size (allowing them to use larger and more damaging weapons) and great Strength (which grow quickly as they gain levels) give them a melee attack that rivals the most dedicated fighter or barbarian. Only a giant's ranged combat options are limited, though using thrown weapons (granting the full damage bonus from their Strength scores) helps offset this limitation.

Giants don't have the hit points of fighters or barbarians, and their Constitution does not swell at the same rate at their

Strength. Coupled with a great difficulty in maintaining a high Dexterity, this fact means giants are almost always found in heavy armor. However they rarely both with shields, preferring to keep a hand free to grapple a foe or to use a two-handed weapon. A giant's best defense is a strong offense, and they all know it.

Abilities: Strength is the most important ability for a giant, as they depend on a high damage output to fell foes quickly. Constitution is also important, to give the giant the toughness needed to survive the inevitable mobs that surround wandering giants. Dexterity is a losing proposition -- a giant suffers to many penalties to armor class from size and low base Dexterity to avoid heavy armor, making Dexterity scores above 12 or so largely useless.

Races: It is most common to build a giant from the core giant race, but it is far from the only option. A dwarf with giant class levels becomes a sizeable master of stone and smithy work that is surprisingly iconic. An elf with giant class levels is a tall, thin master of ancient groves and strange shores. A half-orc with giant class levels is easily mistaken for an ogre, even by other ogres.

Alignment: A giant class character may be of any alignment.

Starting Gold: 6d4 [[TS]] 10 (150 gp).

Starting Age: As barbarian.

Table 1-1: The Giant Hit Die: d8

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+0	+2	+0	+0	Tough hide
2nd	+1	+3	+0	+0	Heavy frame
3rd	+2	+3	+1	+1	Rock throwing
4th	+3	+4	+1	+1	
5th	+3	+4	+1	+1	
6th	+4	+5	+2	+2	Giant power
7th	+5	+5	+2	+2	
8th	+6/+1	+6	+2	+2	
9th	+6/+1	+6	+3	+3	Giant power
10th	+7/+2	+7	+3	+3	
11th	+8/+3	+7	+3	+3	
12th	+9/+4	+8	+4	+4	Giant power
13th	+9/+4	+8	+4	+4	
14th	+10/+5	+9	+4	+4	
15th	+11/+6/+1	+9	+5	+5	Giant power
16th	+12/+7/+2	+10	+5	+5	
17th	+12/+7/+2	+10	+5	+5	
18th	+13/+8/+3	+11	+6	+6	Giant power
19th	+14/+9/+4	+11	+6	+6	
20th	+15/+10/+5	+12	+6	+6	

Class Skills (2 + Int modifier per level, ×4 at 1st level): Bluff, Climb, Craft, Gather Information, Handle Animal, Heal, Intimidate, Jump, Knowledge (any, each taken individually), Listen, Perform, Profession, Search, Sense Motive, Spot, Survival, Swim.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Giants are proficient with all martial and simple weapons, and light, medium and heavy with armor. Giants are not proficient with shields of any kind.

Tough Hide (Ex): At 1st level, your skin becomes thick and leathery, granting you a natural armor bonus of +1. This

bonus increases to +2 at 2ndlevel, and every even-numbered level giant class level after that. (This means a giant class character's natural armor bonus is always equal to his Fortitude save bonus from this class.)

Heavy Frame (Ex): At 2nd level your frame begins to thicken, and your muscles cord and bulge with giantish power. You gain a +2 giant bonus to your Strength and a +1 giant bonus to your Constitution score. At every even level (4th, 6th, 8th, etc.) these bonuses increase by +2 Strength and +1 Constitution, to a maximum of +20 Strength and +10 Constitution at 20th level.

This same heavy frame makes it very difficult for a Giant to stay quick or agile. At every even level, when a giant's Strength and Constitution go up, his Dexterity is reduced by one, to a minimum of 10. As a result most giants do not bother to develop their Dexterity scores, though it's certainly possible to boost their score with magic items and spells.

Giant Power: As creatures of myth and magic, giants gain new powers as they increase in age and experience. At 6th level, and every three levels thereafter (9th, 12th, 15th, etc) a giant class character gains one of the following powers. Once a power has been selected it cannot be changed.

Claws (Ex): You gain two claws as natural weapon. They deal damage equal to a short sword of your size category. Any time you have both hands free you can make two claw attacks at your full base attack bonus as a full round action. If you have just one hand free you may make a claw attack as a secondary attack at -5 to your attack roll as part of a full attack action with another weapon.

Darkvision (Ex): You gain darkvision with a 90 ft. range.

Elemental Subtype (Ex): You gain the cold, earth, fire or water subtype. You gain all the normal abilities and drawbacks of your chosen subtype, You cannot have more than one elemental subtype. If you take the earth subtype you gain a natural burrow move rate equal to one-quarter you normal move (minimum 10 feet). If you take the water subtype, you also gain the aquatic subtype, allowing to breath underwater and giving you a natural swim speed equal to half your land move rate.

Fast Healing (Su): You have fast healing equal to 1/3rd your giant class levels per round (fast healing 2 at 6th level, fast healing 3 at 9th, and so on). Your fast healing only functions when you are at 50% of your total hit points or less. You can not have both fast healing and regeneration.

Regeneration (Su): You have regeneration equal to 1/3rd your giant class levels per round (regeneration 2 at 6th level, regeneration 3 at 9th, and so on). Your fast healing only functions when you are at 50% of your total hit points or less. Acid and fire damage deal normal damage to you, unless you are of the fire subtype in which case acid and cold deal normal damage to you. You can not have both fast healing and regeneration.

Scent (Ex): You gain the Scent ability.

Size Increase (Ex): You gain one size category (going from Large to Huge, or Huge to Gargantuan for example). You gain the normal size modifiers to attack rolls, armor class, and skills as well as the ability to use weapons and equipment of your new size. You also gain a +4 increase to your Strength, a +2 increase to your Constitution, a +1 increase to your natural armor, and a 10 ft. increase to all your movement types. However, you suffer a -2 penalty to your Dexterity score. You may not select size increase twice in a row (at 6th and 9th level, for example).

Spell-Like Abilities (Sp): You gain a spell-like ability. This si a spell of a level no more than one third your giant class levels, which you may cast once per day as a cleric or sorcerer of your class level. You may select this power multiple times. If you select the same spell as a spell-like ability twice, you may use it three times per day.

Terrain Affinity (Su): You have a mystic affinity for one environment type (both a climate and terrain type -- cold, temperate or warm; aquatic, desert, plains, forest, hills, mountains, marsh, underground). When in this environment you gain a +4 bonus to all Climb, Hide, Jump, Knowledge (nature), Listen, Move Silently, Spot, Survival, and Swim checks. You may choose more than one terrain affinity, but all your affinities must share a common climate or terrain element (thus you may choose cold desert, cold plains and cold mountains, or temperate forest and temperate hills, but

not cold aquatic and hot marsh).

Prescient Atomic Horror

by Brian Rogers

One key aspect of the *Atomic Horror* genre is taking the things that 1950's contemporary society was afraid of and providing an outsized example as the movie's threat. The fear of communism becomes pod people; feminism becomes a 50-foot woman. Silly, sure; campy, definitely; but it makes them a great snapshot of a culture and its fears.

When developing *Atomic Horror* adventures there is the realization that what scared us then isn't the same as what scares us now -- we just aren't quite as afraid of UFOs or atomic giant monsters. Of course, there's no reason (besides taste and good sense?) we can't translate our current cultural fears into Atomic Horror by applying the *Atomic Horror* out-sizing principle to what we see as our current threats.

Applying these to a classic *Atomic Horror* game provides a degree of ironic distance -- contemporary players running 1950's heroes battling 21st century society's fears -- which make it easy to play these for laughs. But it can also generate a surprising dissonance when the players discover the threat is no longer quite so comfortably distant. This may be more acceptable than inserting an Atomic Horror ethos into an otherwise normal contemporary campaign, an act which can make players feel that what they're playing is not what they signed on for.

Greenhouse Gasses

Scientists stumble on an airborne chemical that accelerates plant growth. Originally trumpeted as a boon for farmers, the gasses spread as an ominous, invisible cloud, causing massive growth of all flora. The heroes must deal with towns lost under the grass, cities overrun with vines, rapidly adapting plant defenses (toxins, allergies, thorns, insect swarms) and the super-abundance of oxygen leading to irrational behavior and flash fires. At the end of the day the fires might be the solution, burning out modified plants and cleansing the world of the problem. Until a sequel that looks at what eating those undetectably modified plants did to us. . . Cue the zombies!

2 Yttrium + 1 Potassium

The Commies have discovered a compound of mildly irradiated Yttrium & Potassium that shuts down or burns out electrical devices. Can 20th century civilization survive without the use of electronics? Will that strip our high tech edge over those agrarian Chinese hordes? Or prevent our potent atomic deterrent against the Russians? It's the problem of the millennium! Slightly outdated now, of course, but with some great support material.

Global Warming

Astronomers announce activity near Jupiter -- shadows on the surface, moon-sized objects in motion, and heat blooms from inside the gas giant. People are panicking, and someone must do something! The heroes must already possess, be given, or capture a space ship (perhaps prepared as some secret government program), and on Io they learn that BEMs are converting Jupiter into a secondary sun with the goal of colonizing all those nice low-gravity moons. This might render Earth uninhabitable . . . There's no evidence of that, they counter, and the tipping point could be years away. Fortunately these fragile-boned menaces fall to a good sock to the jaw, but heroes better do so quick, before their ultra-tech is aimed at Earth!

Population Explosion

"The A-bomb tests near Clutch, NV are certainly nothing to worry about -- look, this young mother just had happy, healthy triplets" trumpeted the news agencies seven years ago. They quieted down when every other woman in the

town showed similar fecundity. More so when those kids matured fast: now biologically teens, they are incomprehensible to their parents and starting to be sexually active. Their first unwed mother had sextuplets, with others soon to follow. So far they've shown an attachment to their birthplace, but Clutch is now struggling to provide food, shelter, education, jobs, and security to a population that demands more every day. Even if the heroes handle the town, there's still one family that moved two months ago, with the mother cooing over her five beautiful new babies in the crowded city . . .

Television Games

Television reaches into our homes, and the children's show *Great Times, America* warms up sets in the afternoon. Parents *were* happy because after the show kids play the physically challenging games the GTA puppets advocated -- they're doing so in groups and adopting the personalities of soldiers, engineers, and snipers of their anti-communist war games, but that's good for the imagination. Then one Dad noticed that the his son's small unit tactics are perfect, he's reading military history and using incomprehensible GTA inspired slang. . . not to mention Russian and German. The heroes probably come at this at an angle, looking into the rise of car thefts and street shootings by criminals who have an uncanny skill at avoiding police patrols. Almost like they'd been trained . . .

Countdown!

"Oldest Man in the World Dies" states the headline in a few newspapers: a 116-year-old Civil War Vet had finally passed on after a six-month illness. Next week a different paper runs a similar headline, about the 115-year-old woman in Australia expiring after a six month illness. Two weeks later there are two more, a pair of different 113-year-olds, both sick six months to the day. Each week brings more deaths as the world is culled by one year every Sunday after a progressive six-month illness. Everyone over 90 is showing signs at the first death, and as the age drops inexorably the health care system is starting to buckle. The precision indicates an intelligent agency, but we can only hope that those responsible can be located . . . and that they're not over 90.

89.

88.

87.

* * *

In addition to these, virtually all Michael Chrichton novels contain the other *Atomic Horror* principle, "science runs amok" (or "Isn't this invention nice and shiny? It'll Kill You!"). Some things that did happen recently already *are* already *Atomic Horror* plots: a pandemic that at first only strikes social deviants? Losing your mind when you eat beef? Those can just be dropped in directly but they might stretch the bounds of good taste and common sense.

Might be better to have [intelligent gorillas](#) taking blue collar jobs. Or [zombies](#). Those always work.

Treks Not Taken: Alternate Voyages

"Not our universe, not our ship. Something -- parallel. A parallel universe coexisting with ours on another dimensional plane. Everything's duplicated -- almost."
-- Captain James T. Kirk, "Mirror, Mirror" *[TOS]*

Forty years ago today, my life changed, and I didn't even know it, because I wasn't even a year old. But that's how alternate histories work, you see; they sneak up on you and take different forms than the ones you might have been anticipating. Forty years ago today, "The Man Trap" aired on NBC, the first ever episode of *Star Trek* to be broadcast. Several years later, I put together a rather alarming number of roleplaying game books based on that show and its epigones, with generally positive consequences for me and mine. And so, to give a little something back on the flipside, here's four alternate *Treks* -- but true to our higher calling here, none of them so ordinary as mirror universes and eternal Klingon wars. Heavens, no. Here are strange new worlds, with some rather familiar names -- all authentic to our history -- at the center of all manner of bold-going missions, five-year and otherwise. Seek them out, won't you?

"Picard, you are about to move into areas of the galaxy containing wonders more incredible than you can possibly imagine . . . and terrors to freeze your soul."
-- Q to Picard, "Q Who?" *[TNG]*

In 1649, the duelist and writer Cyrano de Bergerac traveled to the Moon and to the Sun, meeting the infidel races therein. Essentially peaceful, the Lunars and Solars proved key allies when Cyrano's third voyage roused the Martians to attack the Earth. Fortunately, the burgeoning space navy of King Louis XIV was equal to the task, and sufficiently demonstrated French honor that the punctilious Martians eventually agreed to an armistice. Martian recognition (and an effective monopoly on space flight) left Louis the head of the Confederation du Monde, and eager to spread the light of glorious French civilization out to the moons, comets, and bolides that his astronomers began to chart. Many of them contained villages and towns, just like the Moon and Sun; others seemed only to hold mysteries mathematical and philosophical. Each one was a potential problem, and a potential triumph for French savants. France-du-Monde and its allies came to Mars' defense when that planet was attacked by the invisible ships of the invisible Ninth Planet, somewhere deep beyond Saturn. And war returns to the planets. With a new enemy, France must build a next generation of space ships of the line -- but they travel in search of advanced learning even though their carronades and rockets are always ready to repel treacherous attack.

And who better to command *L'Enterprise,* the queen of the fleet, than the brilliant Jesuit-trained astronomer Jean-Felix Picard? To be sure, he is of increasing years, but his crew is sound enough -- it even includes a bluff Martian soldier of noble birth! Of course, some priests warn that France's new space fleet flaunts God just as the Tower of Babel. They repeat the rumors of Venusian dreamers and Martian scouts, that out in the depths of the heavens the angel Quriel waits to toy with and test trespassers in the celestial, and that beyond him lie the denizens of a soulless city known only as Le Bourg . . . This is, of course, a **GURPS Space-Swashbucklers** campaign, with an "anything goes" aesthetic. Picard and his crew might encounter anything from fallen angels to technological Utopias to parallel universes where the Martian War goes badly.

"'Why, they look like -- I'd swear they're American Indians.'
'They are, Doctor. A mixture of Navajo, Mohican, and Delaware, I believe. All among the more advanced and peaceful tribes.'
'It's like discovering Atlantis . . .'
' . . . or Shangri-la.'"
-- McCoy, Spock, and Kirk, "The Paradise Syndrome" *[TOS]*

The reports of Livingstone, Burton, and the other explorers overturned every notion of orderly geology, history, and geography once cherished by the Royal Society. Africa, amazingly, was bigger inside than it was out -- with rivers and lakes twisting through impenetrable jungles and black mountain caves alike. (Rumor had it that a previous five-year mission by Captain Zebulon Pike had discovered something similar in the American West.) And at every turn was

something uncanny -- a city of lost Romans, or a colony of Irishmen that based its society on the criminal sections of *London Labor and the London Poor,* or enormous amoebas, or ruins of inhuman civilizations, or sentient dinosaurs who prospected for gunpowder. And there were mines -- not just of gold or diamonds but of "duolithium" ores that could harness "negative matter" and unleash immense energies. The British Empire needed that duolithium (and the gold and diamonds) to build its gravity-boats and power their etheric lances. It had to send its best into the African frontier, to boldly go where no white man had gone before. Except, apparently, the Romans . . . and Druids . . . and Crusaders . . . and Marco Polo . . . and Alexander's army . . .

Crimean War medic John Kirk had served well on his first five-year mission, at the side of Henry Livingstone in Darkest Africa from 1858 to 1863. Now, in command of the gravity-corvette *HMS Enterprize,* he sails into Africa alert for the machinations of the Germans, the Russians, and the French. However, he has a first officer from the Republic of Vulcan, founded inside the Virunga volcano by a Roman artificers' cult who practiced ancient arts of memory and psychic prowess. (In fact, it was Burton's contact with the Vulcanians that gave Britain its leg up on duolithium technology.) Kirk knows it's bootless to protest that he's a doctor, not a captain -- if Lord Palmerston, the Great Bird of Whitehall, needs him to be a captain, then he'll be the best captain in the whole Royal Navy. And with Henry "Bones" Livingstone and a Scottish engineer to keep the boilers up, he'll seek out anything that the Royal Society -- or the Royal Navy -- wants, no matter how many redcoats die trying. This **GURPS Steampunk** campaign probably works best if the PCs command their own gravity-ship, since competing with Kirk for spotlight (or for the attentions of the green animal-women of Orongo) is a fool's errand.

"Mister Kim, we're Starfleet officers. Weird is part of the job."
-- Janeway to Kim, "Deadlock" *[VGR]*

It may not look like much, but the *USS Voyager* is the finest U.S. Coast Guard ship in the world. As far as any of the crew can tell, it may be the only U.S. Coast Guard ship in the world. Commissioned by the Navy in 1917, the 52-foot cutter patrolled Lake Michigan out of Chicago after the War for the Treasury Department. On a foggy Halloween of 1922, it followed a hot tip to intercept a big Outfit shipment of bootleg hooch. (Halloween was lucky for *Voyager,* which had a rep as a "haunted" ship.) The Guard sank the Mob boat and captured six or seven gangsters. Then, the mysterious creature in the water struck. Somehow, the Thing knocked *Voyager* out of Lake Michigan -- possibly, out of Earth. When the mist parted, the ship was on the lee shore of some tropical islands -- being attacked by war canoes. Some sort of berserkers nearly sank *Voyager* in a pitched battle, but machine guns turned the tide against spears and axes. Nobody on board recognized any of the languages, or any of the constellations. But there were carvings of Things on some of the islands, so the gangsters and the Guardsmen have made common cause. They'll sail north, looking for a way back to Chicago, and do what they can in the meantime to not kill each other. Even the haunts are working together -- having a ghost for a doctor helps, although nobody will claim it's comforting.

This campaign can be almost entirely open-ended -- I'd be inclined to run it as a **GURPS Fantasy** game, with a convenient "Ocampan" magician or Amazon refugee from the insect-men to add varieties of powers and possibilities, but it can go a few notches darker and be a **GURPS Horror** game with ease. Replace the Thing with a Banestorm and set the adventures of *Voyager* on Yrth, or decide the ship was knocked 7,000 years back in time to **GURPS Atlantis.** It's all up to you, and it's not like anyone's going to mind radical departures from the source material.

"I lied. I cheated. I bribed men to cover the crimes of other men. I am an accessory to murder. But the most damning thing of all . . . I think I can live with it. And if I had to do it all over again . . . I would."
-- Sisko's personal log, "In the Pale Moonlight" *[DS9]*

It was just after the Six-Day War ended in 1967 that Taraq Nur, the "burning light," appeared in the -- now Israeli-occupied -- Sinai Desert. It was a temple complex to rival Petra, on the site (perhaps) of Moses' encounter with the "sapphire throne" of God. And it held a gateway to another world, a wormhole to an ancient Dominion of alien castes and unknown technologies. In order to prevent a new outbreak of the war, as the Egyptians (with Soviet backing) threatened to seize the outpost from the Israelis, President Johnson agreed to send a neutral arbiter to manage the find. He picked Assistant Secretary of State (and CIA agent) Joseph J. Sisco to run the American mission, backed up by an elite team of U.S. Marines. The other powers got their own representatives on the site, which came under nominal UN jurisdiction, although the Israelis continue to provide the bulk of the security.

This *GURPS Espionage* campaign can unreel with Soviet, Chinese, Arab, Israeli, British, and French agents all giving the Americans headaches (and the PCs can be any or all of the above) as the anomalies around the complex get stranger. Or it can shift into a full blown war campaign, as the Dominion -- finally deigning to respond to the pinpricks of exploration from Earth -- launches an invasion of the planet. Will the Dominion ally itself with the increasingly alienated and angry Arabs, using their burning desire for revenge as the wedge that gives it a foothold on the Earth? Can Sisco bring the Soviets and Chinese in on the side of America and her allies? Should he? Can the various castes within the Dominion be set at each others' throats? And what mysterious techniques and technologies exist in the new civilizations on the other side of the wormhole?

Pyramid Review

Arkham Horror: Curse of the Dark Pharaoh Expansion

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Designed by Rob Vaughn

90 cards (22 Exhibit Items, 21 Spells, seven Allies, 18 Barred from Neighborhood, four Benefits, four Detriments, 45 Arkham Locations, 27 Gates, 18 Mythos), instruction sheet; full color, boxed; $19.95

As many as 95% of the problems associated with living in the township of Arkham can be laid at the feet of Professor Armitage. Get rid of this poor dope, and maybe the streets wouldn't fill with blood every fortnight. The original "Dr. Lucky," he pulls in weird artifacts from every corner of the globe and puts them on display. This time he's gotten some bizarre items from Egypt, where they were all too glad to hand them over. No one ever bothers to wonder why. The *Curse of the Dark Pharaoh* expansion (the game title, not the name of the show -- tourism would plummet if visitors knew the exhibits would be jammed in their gut) adds new, ichorous "life" to your *Arkham Horror* game.

The object remains unchanged: As portals open to other worlds, close them and banish the monsters that emerge. Oh, and if the Ancient One shows itself, you'll want to clean that up, too. These new cards can be played as a traveling exhibit or a permanent display at the museum.

The permanent exhibit is simpler, positing that a cultural exchange of museum pieces produces a set of artifacts from Egypt, now part of the standard tour. In game speak: New cards are added to change the play of the game, and most get mixed in with existing decks (new Spells for the Spell deck, for example). If players go the traveling exhibit route (the primal terrors are on display for one viscera-spattered week only), the new cards *replace* the original decks. This assures you see more of your new purchase, and changes the events of the game to make it seem more . . . Egypty?

The graphics merit little elaboration, assuming you've played the original set, save to say the level of quality has dropped not one iota. Whether they have used new artists is not noted -- the credits list only the supplement's designer -- but it's the same creepy and atmospheric joy that made you shudder the first time.

As a permanent exhibit, the game isn't terribly dissimilar. Since it's easy to get used to many of the game's tricks after several plays, the two sets change what players think they know, making it harder to predict how events progress. Primarily this alters the appearance of the gates, though sometimes they don't even produce a portal, choosing instead to supercharge the Ancient One's doom track.

When played as a traveling exhibit, the addition is thrown into sharp relief. There seem to be Mythos cards sufficient to play a single game using only the new cards, but the rules recommend alternating your draws between old and new decks. This adds a little bookkeeping, recalling whence your last pull came, but their suggestion of placing a marker over the last deck used usually suffices. The Location and Gate decks are completely replaced by the new iterations, so your encounters on both sides of the dimensional walls are brand-new. Some Gate cards come in two colors now, making it easier for you to pull a matching gate color from the smaller selection, but some of these demand you face the relevant Ancient One (read: draw a new Investigator). New Exhibit Items mirror the original Unique Items. These Egyptian curios are obtained in much the same way as Unique stuff, but they're worth no money (they only save your life). The rest of the cards are paired up directly -- if someone gets to draw a Spell, for example, he has a choice of getting it from either set.

You're going to need some of those new Spells to soften the opposition up, though once again there's a lot of

duplication in the deck. (Of course, you've got a better chance of getting one of the enchantments you want.) Many Spells are designed to provide a needed edge given the new challenges, moving you around the board and through gates or taking away monster advantages. Those advantages have grown to include *surprise,* a quality by which enemies take away your chance to evade.

Not every card is specifically meant to bring the feel of Egypt to the game, but there are plenty of references to the new exhibit and the Black Egyptian of Lovecraft's world, and at least one laugh-out-loud reference to Erich Weiss for the fans. New Allies seal old skill holes, and various Benefits and Detriments like enjoying Visions or having to lug around a Local Guide may pop up. All these factors combine to make the traveling exhibit one mighty tough nut to crack.

It was never easy getting all the pieces back into the **Arkham Horror** box (and even when you did they'd slide around without a pile of rubber bands and plastic baggies), and with the new **Curse of the Dark Pharaoh** cards you can either carry both boxes with you or learn to maximize space all over again. But that and 20 bucks are small prices to pay for this deft chance to relearn a good game all over again.

--Andy Vetromile

Amundsen City

by Paul Drye

In 1919 a young German boy named Werner von Braun died after falling out a tree he had climbed, and Detente-2's history started diverging slowly from Homeline's. German rocketry efforts never reached the pathological levels they did in Homeline's WWII (and the war in Europe didn't end until June of 1945), then the ripples moved on from there. Among other things, Sergei Korolev had died in the Kolyma gulag for lack of interest in his work, and Robert Goddard had remained a curiosity even after his death.

History

Nikita Khrushchev made a version of his "Secret Speech" in both timelines, consolidating his control over the Soviet Union. Afterwards, looking to advance his policy of peaceful competition with the West, he searched for a propaganda coup to spring on the world. In Homeline he selected the conquest of space on the backs of ICBMs; on Detente-2 no-one had built rockets that would go even 500 miles, let alone into orbit. Here the General Secretary selected the conquest of Antarctica instead. On September 18th, 1956, the Soviets exploded a fission bomb on Drygalski Island in Wilkes Land. In a public speech later that evening, Khrushchev announced that the USSR intended to colonize Antarctica. The nuclear test was explained as "seismic investigation," but the world understood that it was a thrown gauntlet.

While not as stunning to Detente-2's America as Sputnik was on other lines, the Russians did succeed in capturing the US administration's attention. In the dying weeks of his presidency, and looking to secure a legacy after a lackluster eight years, Thomas Dewey formed the civilian Antarctic Development Agency (ADA, for short). Headed by the hastily retired Admiral Richard Cruzen, the ADA rapidly built up an American effort in Marie Byrd Land that tried to match the Russian inroads on the other side of the continent.

Detente-2 is a close parallel, and furthermore it seems to have some of the "historical inertia" that has kept lines like Ezcalli near Homeline's history despite diverging far in the past. While it wanders away from the details, it then wanders back more often than chance would allow. The most obvious sign is the way the "Push to the South" mirrored the Space Race. The Russians started out ahead, and the Americans had trouble at first as the ADA tried to regain the technological lead. A German expatriate (Alfred Ritscher here) got them back on track, and the Americans were considered the winners in the competition when their South Pole station grew over 1,000 people. Most people on Detente-2 say the Push ended with the first birth in Antarctica, Michael Two Eagles, on July 22, 1969. Even the spin-offs touted as a great benefit of the Push look familiar, orange drink crystals and velcro being among them.

Ironically, trying to overcome the difficulties of communicating with Antarctic stations in the interior led to the decline of the program. A microwave relay network criss-crossed the continent, but was incomplete even in 1970; maintenance costs were high. As rocket technology got better, the ADA funded efforts to develop communications

satellites in polar orbit. Spin-offs from this project helped spark Detente-2's delayed Space Age, and polar exploration budgets shrank in the face of the new competition. For much of the 1980s and early 1990s, the Antarctic programs languished, kept alive only by bureaucratic inertia and the fraction of Western society that still believed in "the Frozen Frontier."

Like Space Station Freedom morphed into the ISS in the real world, Amundsen City was saved by internationalizing it in 1993, not long after the fall of the Soviet Union. The various bases at the pole were amalgamated -- as well as the other, supporting stations around the continent -- and the pooled budget streamlined of duplicated efforts. The Americans and Russians gave the most, but Antarctic exploration is fundamentally easier than space flight, and more than a dozen other nations participated from strong #3 Japan down to minor additions from South Africa and Brazil.

Despite the increasingly multifarious nature of the new settlement, it resisted official naming for some time. The Americans and the Russians were the only groups with any real chance of hanging a permanent tag on the settlement, and a tug-of-war ensued over it in a quest to secure political points. Among others proposed were Byrd Base, Somov Base, Union/Soyuz Station (rejected by the Americans as too pedestrian), and even the unwieldy Palmer-Bellinghausen. Eventually the harassed joint-naming committee focused on the first successful expedition to the South Pole, fortunately headed by an explorer from suitably inoffensive Norway. "Amundsen City" was duly recorded and all other older names, acronyms, and initialisms used for the site's formerly independent pieces were thankfully retired.

Even with the new boom, Amundsen City has no reason to be as big as it is. It was built for propaganda purposes during the Cold War and so was self-justifying. With the Cold War over, the city was threatened by severe budget cuts and shrank to just 7,500 personnel. The internationalization of the station helped, then the discovery of Ross Sea oil helped a lot more.

Like Homeline, Detente-2's oil prices jumped at the end of the millennium. It had been known since the 1960s that the Ross Sea coast along the Transantarctic Range -- about 200 miles from the South Pole -- had oil, so once prices got high enough, attention turned to the new deposits. While it costs something like $60 per barrel to recover, the ADA was looking for something to subsidize an already-existing infrastructure, not necessarily profit. As long as they can get some income, they consider the effort worth it, especially since buzz phrases like "energy independence" carry enough political cachet to garner more money from Congress. Since the early 1980s, but especially in the last couple of years, Amundsen City has been half about science and half about oil. The two halves don't get along very well.

The Settlement

Calling Amundsen a city is a bit of vainglory -- there are actually only about 12,000 people living here, with about 5000 long-term residents. However, if it's not a real city, then it's the most high-tech village on Detente-2.

The original pole stations, one American and one Russian, were built into the ice, but before long the two teams discovered the major (if quite mundane) problem with this: snow clearance. Several feet of drifting snow covered the station each year, and this had to be removed to prevent its roof from caving in. The work was continuous, and expensive.

Starting in 1971, the nucleus of the current city was built, and the older facility was entirely abandoned. All new buildings are on movable stilts, which can be jacked up one at a time in sequence in order to stay ahead of the drifts. This proved to be a successful strategy, and after the City was internationalized a modular system it was planted on top of the stilts. Open frame stairs lead down to the only buildings on the ground, the garages for the station's fleet of tracked vehicles.

Each building is part of one of five concentric rings, originally centered on the Pole. This was a bit of theater that proved to be useless, as the ice moves about 30 feet per year in the general direction of Argentina. The geographic pole is now under a non-descript housing cluster, but station brass still uses the center of their circles. The rings are divided into sections, just three for the inner one, and 30 for the outermost. Each section is joined to the ones on either side by neoprene and kevlar "airlocks" so they can be cordoned off when being swapped around. An axis, running more or less along the international date line (or Greenwich Meridian, depending on which side of the pole one is on) pierces all the

rings so staff can walk between them without going outside.

The buildings themselves are built on an oval cross-section, with the long axis parallel to the ground. This presents a wing-like profile to the wind no matter which direction it blows, and prevents dead air pockets where snow builds up. The central part of each oval is large enough to stand up in, while the smaller spaces on the rings' outer and inner rims are filled with support equipment, like plumbing and electrical wiring.

The outer rings are dominated by housing and recreational space, largely supplied by the Americans and Russians. There's officially no discrimination in who lives where, but no one cracks down on informal trades so there are ethnic knots named "Russki Town" and the like. This trend has become particularly pronounced since the oil drillers came to town; they cluster together on one side of the base, and have more free-wheeling forms of entertainment in their area.

Scientific spaces take up the innermost rings, including a geology lab supplied by Canada, a British observatory (optical and radio), a Japanese material sciences lab, a multi-national weather station, and many others. Most are engaged in pure science and support of Antarctic exploration, though some of them put in time helping the corporations exploiting the Ross Sea efforts.

Daily Life

The city itself is dominated by the scientific establishment, while the oil industry is strung out along a 200-mile route between the South Pole and the point of the Ross Sea, following the edge of the Mercer Ice Stream through a pass in the coastal mountains.

The biggest difficulty for visitors to the City is cold. At the height of summer, the temperature rarely exceeds 0deg; Fahrenheit; towards the end of winter, the air often pushes -100deg;. Fortunately, the winds average only about 10 miles per hour, and rarely exceed 30. GMs are directed to page 430 of the *Basic Set,* but in brief characters are going to be making HT -- or Survival (Arctic) -- rolls every 15 minutes at a modifier of up to -1 per 10 degrees below 0.

Night is the other major hurdle to jump, particularly the long polar one stretching from the third week of March to the third week of September -- plus or minus a few days thanks to the weather and atmospheric refraction. Apart from the fundamental problem of needing artificial light to accomplish much, there are psychological difficulties as well. This is compounded by the long night corresponding with the lowest temperatures and the need to stay inside as much as possible. Agents with any sort of darkness or claustrophobia-related disadvantages (or even quirks) are risking being under stress for almost 200 days. Realistically, even adventurers who aren't influenced by their character sheet are running similar risks, but in practice it would be ill-advised for a GM to throw this into the mix without consulting the players first. It may be wiser to reserve dark-induced lunacy for GM-run characters, to be invoked by fiat or plot necessity.

As well as having to handle the cold and long winter dark, Amundsen City is also sitting on a great deal of ice, enough to make it one of the highest major settlements in the world. At 9,300 feet, it's at the same altitude as the settled parts of the Andes mountains. It doesn't rank with cold and dark for trouble-making, but many people have problems with altitude sickness while visiting the pole. The Russians have established an intermediate base in Wilkes Land that they use to acclimatize their people before moving up to Amundsen, while the Americans have done the same in the Transantarctic Mountains. If visitors to the city don't have a chance to get used to the low air pressure, refer to page 429 of the *Basic Set* and its description of Thin atmosphere. Fortunately, Amundsen is at the lower edge of the danger zone, so a day's worth of acclimatization before heading there is enough to stave off the effects.

Amundsen City and the Infinite Worlds

On several timelines, particularly some of the weirder ones, it's worth visiting Antarctica. For example, global warming, or magic, or whatnot might have made the continent habitable. Even if it's still frozen, the southernmost continent seems to be a magnet for paranormal and supernatural activity, and Paralabs is keen on examining that sort of thing.

Setting up a permanent conveyor and projector station in Homeline Antarctica turned out to be too expensive, and Infinity has scaled back its operations there in recent years. Instead, they've picked a timeline on each accessible Quantum where the heavy lifting had already been done, parasitizing those efforts for Infinity's gain. At TL8 and with a developed Antarctica, Detente-2 is the choice on Q-6.

Infinity has infiltrated the American and British Antarctic efforts. Teams headed to any Antarctica on Quantum-6 translate from somewhere temperate on Homeline to Detente-2. Then they go south under the cover of innocuous Antarctic missions, endorsed by Infinity's moles and using Detente-2's well-developed Antarctic infrastructure. Once there they can go along the Amundsen City-Ross Sea road to an isolated warehouse stuffed with parachronic equipment, and ship out to their final destination.

The Australian and New Zealander expeditions are also compromised, but mostly to prevent Centrum from claiming them. It's assumed that the Centrum will find it too hard to corrupt the Russian and South American efforts -- the others are too small to matter -- though the I-Cops do keep an eye peeled just in case.

Characters

Ed MacCready: The last in a long line of Pennsylvania coal miners, MacCready made it out west when that industry collapsed in the 1950s and got into the Alaska oil fields. By the late 1980s his Timberland Drilling was a minor player in the area, but was also one of the most important controlled by a single person. When the US government and the ADA started subsidizing Antarctic drilling, he dove in while the larger conglomerates dithered. Most of his business is in the far south now, but he's threatened by the belated presence of the big oil companies.

Ed is often a patron for adventurers in Amundsen City. He controls Timberland himself, which means a lot of quick but unorthodox decisions about what needs to be done. He's got enough money to make plays, but not enough to keep a large security staff around to do it for him; free agents work best for him. Finally, he's perfectly willing to be underhanded, a tendency made stronger by his need to feel he's the savviest, most creative operator around. If his agenda and Infinity's mesh, then agents may end up executing some scheme of his.

He is a white American male, just shy of 70 years old, still in good shape but starting to show the fragility of being past middle age. He is mostly bald, and clean-shaven, with gray hair fringing his head; he wears an epically awful black toupee.

Ed MacCready   *155 points*

Human; 5'9"; 210

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 12 [20].
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 13 [6]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 15 [9].
Basic Speed 6 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 9; Parry 9 (Brawling).

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].
CF: Western (Native) [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages

Cultural Adaptability [10]; Daredevil [15]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Disadvantages

Curious (12 or less) [-5]; Greed (12 or less) [-15]; Miserliness (12 or less) [-10]; Odious Personal Habit (Smokes pungent Kazakh cigars) -1 [-5]; Overconfidence (12 or less) [-5]; Reputation (Skirts the law) -1 (Almost everyone; All the time) [-5]; Sense of Duty (Comrades) (Small Group) [-5].

Quirks: Calls everyone "Buddy"; Horrible Hangovers; Refuses to admit to his (obvious) toupee [-3].

Skills

Administration-13 (IQ+1) [4]; Brawling-12 (DX+0) [1]; Carousing-14 (HT+2) [4]; Cartography/TL8-12 (IQ+0) [2]; Computer Operation/TL8-12 (IQ+0) [1]; Driving/TL8 (Automobile)-12 (DX+0) [2]; Driving/TL8 (Construction Equipment)-11 (DX-1) [1]; Driving/TL8 (Tracked)-11 (DX-1) [1]; Electronics Operation/TL8 (Communications)-13 (IQ+1) [4]; Fast-Talk-14 (IQ+2) [8]; Gambling-11 (IQ-1) [1]; Geology/TL8 (Earthlike)-10 (IQ-2) [1]; Guns/TL8 (Rifle)-13 (DX+1) [2]; Hiking-12 (HT+0) [2]; Law (Property Law)-12 (IQ+0) [4]; Merchant-11 (IQ-1) [1]; Navigation/TL8 (Land)-13 (IQ+1) [4]; Prospecting/TL8-13 (IQ+1) [4]; Public Speaking-11 (IQ-1) [1]; Streetwise-13 (IQ+1) [4]; Survival (Arctic)-13 (Per+1) [4]; Writing-12 (IQ+0) [2].

Petra Naqtaruliq: Born in Northern Labrador to Inuit parents, Petra is one of several dozen people from Arctic North America recruited to work in the far south. Like most of the rest, she was considered useful for her experience with polar conditions, but Petra herself wasn't content to work out in the field. In the nine years since she was hired, she's worked her way up to being the head of security for Amundsen City. Unfortunately for her, her main skills are practical, not bureaucratic or diplomatic, and in the international station that's the opposite of what she really needs.

Since she took over the security division, Petra has become more and more frustrated, partly by the lack of action in a town with little crime, and partly by her dislike of all the paperwork. As much as possible she tries to get out to the Ross Sea settlements -- under her jurisdiction as well -- where the roughnecks are more entertainingly violent. If she gets her teeth into a real mystery in Amundsen, she won't want to let go.

Naqtaruliq is typical in appearance for an Inuit woman, "Asian-looking" in a vague way (people sometimes guess she's Filipino), stocky, and with long, glossy black hair that she keeps in braids. She is in her late 30s.

Petra Naqtaruliq   *165 points*

Human; 5'5"; 150

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 12 [2]; Will 13 [5]; Per 13 [5]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 10 (Brawling).

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].
CF: Western (Native) [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0]; Inuktitut (Native) [6]; Russian (Accented/Semi-Literate) [3].

Advantages

Legal Enforcement Powers 1 [5]; Police Rank 2 [10]; Unfazeable [15].

Disadvantages

Addiction (Tobacco) (Cheap) (Highly addictive; Legal) [-5]; Code of Honor (Professional) [-5]; Dependent (Daughter (Emmy)) (No more than 100%) (9 or less; Loved one) [-2]; Duty (Police Department) (12 or less (quite often)) [-10]; Honesty (12 or less) [-10]; Light Sleeper [-5]; Stubbornness [-5].

Quirks: Constantly curses in Inuktitut; Procrastinates over paperwork [-2].

Skills

Administration-11 (IQ-1) [1]; Brawling-14 (DX+2) [4]; Computer Operation/TL8-13 (IQ+1) [2]; Criminology/TL8-14 (IQ+2) [8]; Detect Lies-14 (Per+1) [8]; Driving/TL8 (Tracked)-12 (DX+0) [2]; Fast-Draw (Pistol)-12 (DX+0) [1]; First Aid/TL8 (Human)-12 (IQ+0) [1]; Forced Entry-12 (DX+0) [1]; Forensics/TL8-10 (IQ-2) [0]; Guns/TL8 (Pistol)-14 (DX+2) [4]; Law (Local Police)-13 (IQ+1) [8]; Savoir-Faire (Police)-13 (IQ+1) [2]; Search-13 (Per+0) [2]; Stealth-12 (DX+0) [2]; Streetwise-12 (IQ+0) [2]; Survival (Arctic)-15 (Per+2) [8]; Tonfa-12 (DX+0) [2].

Adventure Seeds

Enemy of My Enemy: Ed MacCready's nose for adventure and intrigue leads him to decide that there's some secret project going on in Amundsen City, and he contacts the team on the strength of their past work. (How did he find them? Hey, he has contacts!) The adventurers rapidly discover that what Ed's got wind of is Infinity's crosstime operation -- though he's no idea of what it is -- and that he wants the group to investigate and tell him all about it. If the investigators throw this one upstairs to their real bosses, they get back word that Homeline thinks it's safest to go along with him; MacCready is too well-known to send to Coventry easily. For now, they need to figure out how to throw him off the scent.

Darkness of Heart: Well into the six-month winter night, a technician in Amundsen snaps and goes on a killing spree. The first the agents hear about it is when the nut holes up in Infinity's parachronic equipment warehouse along the road to the Ross Sea. They're closer than the police, but not by too much. They've got less than an hour to get the gunman out before the cops barge in and discover they've got more on their hands than just a guy with a gun.

Was That Always There?: Braver GMs may want to play with the fact that Detente-2 has some historical inertia. The pre-history of this timeline could have been radically different from Homeline's and only gradually sloped back towards congruence since humans appeared on the scene. In other words, an opportunity exists to surprise a complacent gaming group by presenting what appears to be a moderately hard science setting in Amundsen Station, then springing some madness-inducing mountains or frozen Atlanteans. Also on the high-weirdness front, in the real world some have accused the American missions to Antarctica in the late 1940s of being military excursions against Thulian Nazis.

Using Amundsen City In Other Settings

It's trickier to use Amundsen in a fantasy campaign than in any other kind of setting, as it depends to a large extent on peculiarly modern wrinkles in politics. Still, key elements of cold, isolation, and previous glory can be ported across. If the setting has some magical means of crossing long distances, moongates or the like, the city's role as a place for the adventurers to pass through can be salvaged too. The long-gone empire of the previous age founded the town as a temple complex to the god of sky and winter, and then it slowly wound down as the present era dawned. Now the setting's analog of Vikings have moved in, fearfully respectful of the old priesthood, and things are fermenting once again. Enter the travelers, possibly with secret knowledge that the temple's altar can be used to travel great distances by magic.

Modern and pulp adventures are the easiest to create with Admundsen. Who really knows what's at the South Pole anyway? Sure, you see pictures of the real-world Amundsen-Scott Station, but if there's any place in the world where you can pull off the tight security and disinformation a large, hidden facility needs, it's the South Pole. For modern adventures, it's the CIA and MI5 running things for all the usual motivations; in pulp (or Atomic Horror) campaigns

there's good ol' Nazi Neu-Schwabenland to fall back on.

Sci-fi settings can use Amundsen City too, if not as cleanly as with modern adventures. If space travel is relatively new or difficult, something much like the city can be dropped on Saturn's moon Enceladus, or some tide-locked iceball in the Omicron Quadrant. The small number of worlds in most near-future settings explains why someplace as borderline as Planet Antarctica has been colonized, and even if the Russians and Americans per se don't exist, most settings have black hats and white hats to use as substitutes.

In more-sprawling space settings, like *Traveller,* Earth is often prime real estate, massively populated and at the center of countless trade routes. Under those circumstances, consider using Amundsen City largely as is. If it costs 10 kilocredits per square foot of real estate in New New York, someone's going to start thinking Antarctica is worthwhile.

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

Do You Want Fries With Your Innovation?

In a lot of ways, the **d20 System** revolution of the past half-decade has turned the game publishing world into a universe of Applebee's.

For those of you not here in the states or part of the Canadian collective, I should probably explain. Applebee's is a chain of restaurants catering to what is known as "casual dining." This style of dining is oft-described as "American," and is perhaps best bolstered with the adjective "uniform." At Applebee's you can get a selection of burgers, salads, steaks, and other entrees. For the most part, you can go into any Applebee's in the world and get more or less the same experience as you would anywhere else, although the Canadian experience will be slightly more cosmopolitan owing to the dual-language menus. Two people can enjoy a meal at Applebee's (sans alcohol) for about the cost of an annual *Pyramid* subscription The food is generally tasty, but doesn't exactly spark life-long passion among its consumers. Among my circle of friends, Applebee's was usually the compromise choice . . . nobody's first option, but an agreeable enough answer for all to grudgingly accept. Frankly, if Applebee's ever got rid of their Fiesta Lime Chicken (formerly known as the Tequila Lime Chicken), I'd probably never go there.

(For the deeply curious, more information can be found at [Applebee's website](#) or on [Wikipedia](#) . . . along with the rest of [human knowledge](#).)

Now the curious thing about Applebee's is that, for the most part, the fare at Applebee's isn't unique to Applebee's. I would guess about 70% of its menu is duplicated near-verbatim at any of a myriad of other chain restaurant options: [Chili's](#), [Bennigan's](#), [T.G.I. Friday's](#), and near-countless other proper nouns wielding a possessive like they were knife-wielding gangs carving out chunks of territory in the strip malls of the world.

Indeed, if you were to blindfold me, stuff me into the trunk of a car, drive for seven hours, take me out, and push me shivering and staggering into a building you identified as a restaurant, all I would need to ask -- while still devoid of sight -- is, "Are the walls appointed with garage-sale bric-a-brac?" If the answer to this was in *any* way affirmative, I could sit down with full confidence and say, "I'll have the chicken fingers with honey mustard sauce." And, having completed the meal of breaded avian, I would be no closer to knowing where I was, unless I happened to overhear the staff forced to sing their happy birthday song at a nearby table.

This uniformity of product -- a product that, I should mention, is pretty darn tasty -- is much the same problem I have with the remains of the current gaming landscape. It wasn't too long ago that there was a cornucopia of gaming diversity in the aisles of my Friendly Local Game Shop. Now, not so much.

Taking a look at the turn of the millennium, some systems that spring to mind include **Aberrant** (super-attributes which attempt to resolve interactions between supers and mortals in a quick method without a fistful of dice), **Godlike** (a gritty system attempting to resolve both whether something succeeded and *how* it did so), **Hackmaster** (an attempt to bring back old-school gaming mixed with more modern innovations), **7th Sea, Star Trek** (from Decipher), and others.

As a rules tinkerer, I find myself somewhat stymied by the lack of more recent options on store shelves. To me, new game systems always meant a new approach -- a glimpse into what the creators of the game saw as important. This importance is useful, *even if I'm not planning on changing my game systems,* because it gets me to thinking about how the game I'm running can be improved by scavenging pieces from elsewhere.

For example, degrees of success weren't really on my mind back when I was running the ol' Third Edition of **GURPS.** Back then, you either succeeded or you didn't. However, around the same time I started playing one of White Wolf's storyteller system games, where how well you succeeded is almost as important as the fact that you did succeed. After that, I started incorporating some notion of how well something succeeded into my **GURPS** games. Such cross-pollination was commonplace throughout my gaming days; finding one game that used something like, say, a Karma or Fate Point system that my players enjoyed pretty much meant that *all* games I ran from that point on would have a similar system.

Unfortunately, the migration toward the vast majority of games being in some way *d20 System*-based has closed off many of these new avenues from which I would normally assimilate. It's turned the entire gaming landscape into . . . well, chicken fingers.

Now, that's not to say that some *d20 System* games have done something innovative or remarkable. ***Mutants & Masterminds,*** for example, pokes and prods the core *d20 System* to within an inch of its life, and before that I enjoyed the changes that *Spycraft* brought to the table. But I also couldn't help but feel these games succeed not because they're inspired by the limitations of the *d20 System,* but rather they manage to do the best they can within the limitations imposed upon them by the marketplace. I also can't help but ponder what these system developers could have come up with had they not been forced to start with the *d20 System* as a core. (Of course, I could be deluding myself. Maybe if the creators of *Spycraft* were unleashed they'd come up with a masterpiece akin to the old TSR ***Indiana Jones RPG.***

One of my criteria for eating out at a sit-down restaurant is that I almost always want to order something that I couldn't make for myself or get something that's 90% of the same for a lot cheaper. For example, most casual-dining places fail this test with their burger offerings; I can usually slap my own slap of protein down on a grill and toss it on a bun at home. And I can get something similar for a third of the price by going to Burger King. But something like a properly prepared fajita or a precisely blackened tilapia is beyond my skill, so I enjoy tossing money at professionals for that endeavor. Chicken fingers fail this criteria in almost every regard; I can get almost the exact same meal at home by buying a bulk box of pre-breaded chicken fingers, whipping open a bottle of honey mustard dressing, and going to town. As such, I hardly ever order chicken fingers from a restaurant unless I *do* happen to be brought in, blindfolded and dazed from riding in the trunk of a car for seven hours.

I miss the lack of innovation from most mainstream possibilities nowadays; although I can (and do) enjoy chicken fingers, they're almost never my first choice. The omnipresence of an offering means it's easy to prepare and doesn't offend too many people; it does *not* mean that it's the best choice for everyone. I still seek out the Fiesta Lime Chicken amid a sea of sameness, and I still eagerly await the next game that's got a neat system or innovation that makes *all* games better.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Mastermind's Manual (for [Mutants & Masterminds](#))

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by Steve Kenson

Cover by Udon with Chris Stevens

Illustrated by Attila Adorjany, Brett Barkley, Eric Canete, John Christopher, Storn A. Cook, Tom Feister, Tariq Hassan, Scott James, Georges Jeanty, "Rey" Lewis, Tony Parker, Ramon k Perez, Steve Scott, Kevin Stokes, Craig Taillifer, Udon with Chris Stevens, & Dexter Vines

160-page full-color hardcover; $32.95

> *[Editor's Note: This book was edited by Pyramid Editor Steven Marsh, who frequently speaks of himself in the third person.]*

The *Mastermind's Manual* is not -- as the title suggests -- a supplement devoted to the chief villain in your superhero campaign. This is not to say that a supplement devoted to that subject would be a bad thing, but a GM wanting such a book will have to look elsewhere. Rather the *Mastermind's Manual* is a supplement for the *[Mutants & Masterminds](#)* GM designed to help him modify his game with an emphasis firmly on the crunch. This is a volume devoted to expanding the core mechanics of the new second edition with a host of new rules, options, and variants, all of which are designed to let the GM tinker to his heart's desire to get the game that he wants.

It goes without saying that this book looks great. The simple clean layout is punctuated by some great artwork all done in comic book style. Almost any one of the pieces on show here could grace either the cover or the inside of a comic book. The writing is equally as engaging with the author taking time to step out in side boxes entitled "Under The Hood" to discuss the whys and wherefores of a particular rules option.

The *Mastermind's Manual* starts with the basics -- *Mutants & Mastermind's* resolution mechanics, suggesting (for example) using the dice differently or different dice, or even the dropping them in favor of cards. More interesting though are the suggestions on handling skill challenges. By taking a penalty on the difficulty check, a hero can attempt a task faster, more efficiently, or with panache. This is backed up with suitable suggestions for numerous skills. Alternatively, each of the suggested challenges -- for example, driving with one hand on the wheel to give a free action -- can be purchased as a feat. Skills get their own chapter with suggestions for new uses for existing skills, creating new ones, broadening them for a simpler game, narrowing them for a more detailed game, and so on.

Guidelines are given for building templates that allow for the easier creation of characters. They can be racial or vocational and make NPCs easy to create, especially if the GM includes alien races in his game. Curiously, there are rules for random core ability scores, which seem at odds with the point-buy system of the game. That said, it works in other superhero RPGs -- for example, *Golden Heroes* (recently released as *Squadron UK*); for the whole hog, it can be combined with the random superpower rules.

For new feats, the book suggests deriving them from existing powers, for example, Rapid Healing is the equivalent to the Regeneration Power Rank 1, but it cannot be switched off or pushed through extra effort -- it is a permanent ability. Martial artists can take on a style by selecting the relevant skills and feats, with suggestions given for several fighting styles, from aikido to wrestling and including ninjitsu.

Given the genre, it is no surprise that powers get no little attention. It explains how a power is constructed, basically showing how new powers can be created and existing ones modified. Not only are the core books powers broken down as examples, but new powers given.

Two of these are both complex and powerful, the Variable Power allowing a hero to redirect his power points to new traits, while the Power Array lets a player build a package of powers built to a theme, such as a weapons suite for a battle suit or a set of alternate forms for a metamorph. There is advice on their construction and use, but examples would have been useful too. Other genre-enforcing rules allow for power surges, making the extra effort, and the effects of Taint. This can model the effects of corruption, mutation, pure evil, and even a progressive disease, which should come in the form of drawbacks, ability loss, and even minor benefits. For example, the latter might be the gaining of otherwise forbidden powers. The advice on handling power addresses problem powers such as ESP, Incorporeal, and so on. It is good advice, as is the handling of related genre conventions -- heroes forgetting powers, and the consequences of using powers such as a bad reputation and legal problems.

Combat in *Mutants & Masterminds* is intended to be quick and in keeping with the game, so the new options for combat do not stray from this. Rather, they enable the GM to alter the style for combat in his game, from realistic and deadly down to simple. Similarly, the chapters on technology are quite short, the bulk of which is devoted to a slick set of rules for handling vehicles and chases.

Specifically under the Game Master's section is a guide to adventuring in different environments from aquatic to urban, and even covers just getting lost. More useful (if the GM employs the guidelines about the consequences using powers given earlier) is the quick and dirty rules for the legal system. The rules over, there is actual advice for the GM on running *Mutants & Masterminds,* writing adventures, and looking at the effects of powers, in particular on society at large. This is in interesting read that deserves further expansion; we can only hope that the author is given space in a less rules-focused supplement. Rounding out the volume are appendices containing a FAQ for the game, an errata, and the designer's notes. Finally there is a checklist of options to let the players know which are being used in a game.

Despite this being a rules focused supplement, the *Mastermind's Manual* is an enjoyable read. This is entirely due to Kenson's writing, especially in the "Under The Hood" sections, which shows off his appreciation of the genre. Still this is not a book that the players need read, the GM of course being the one to get the most out of the contents. For the GM this is a very useful supplement, helping him to tinker with the rules with ease and without breaking the genre.

--Matthew Pook

Designers' Notes: GURPS Bio-Tech

by David Morgan-Mar and David Pulver

For me (David Morgan-Mar), it all began in February 2004. I had no inkling that *GURPS Fourth Edition* was well into the production stages, and was wondering which of my *Third Edition* book ideas to try submitting next. The e-mail from Dr. Kromm contained two bombshells: *GURPS Fourth Edition* was on its way, and I was being invited to co-author the new edition of *Bio-Tech* with David Pulver.

The first order of business was to assign duties on the new edition. Since David Pulver was working on the new edition of *Ultra-Tech,* I took on the job of outlining and writing enough new material to expand the previous edition by 112 pages.

That's a lot of new material.

I grabbed some stuff from *Transhuman Space,* which had raised the bar on biotech rules and material since the old edition. Then I added an entire chapter on medical technology, including expanded rules for medical conditions and treatments beyond those in the *Basic Set.* The plants and animals chapter from the previous edition was expanded into two chapters, one devoted to microorganisms and the many things they can do in a biotechnological society. Drugs and wet nanotech also got a new chapter.

Given a directive from editorial to keep the "Generic" in *GURPS,* I wrote a section on variant biotech, covering everything from magic through steampunk and on to horror. The expanded size gave us room to include the biological magic spells from David Pulver's [original edition designer's notes](#).

Then there's campaign material. I added a big section on the ethical and legal issues surrounding biotech -- problems that simply ooze plot hooks for GMs wanting to challenge a group of heroes with an ethical dilemma or a call to action. And finally, I developed four new campaign settings to showcase the diversity of possibilities for a biotech world, spanning tech levels from TL2 to TL12, some in which biotech enables a better existence, and some in which it produces despair.

With that done, David Pulver began revising all the material from the first edition of *Bio-Tech,* to turn it into *Fourth Edition* rules. He also added a few new bits and pieces, which helped round out the manuscript. The playtest was fast and furious, and we received an enormous amount of useful comments and suggestions that polished the rough edges. The last edition of *Bio-Tech* had to be hastily rewritten to include information about Dolly the sheep, who was cloned from another sheep as the manuscript was being finalized. In a field that changes as fast as biotech, we were naturally faced with similar last-minute developments. Thankfully some of our playtesters do biotech for a living, and kept us informed of breaking news while also making sure we got the facts right.

Finally, when all was said and done, we had to cut something because, well . . . 112 pages just wasn't enough! With sadness, I agreed that two of the campaign settings would be the simplest to remove. But despair not, for you are about to receive one of the cut settings in its entirety. Enjoy!

* * *

Atrivita

In 2004 the United Nations enacted a treaty outlawing the production of human clones. Not only babies who would grow into adult clones, but also cloning of embryos for stem cell research. Powerful governments the world over grew ever more paranoid and conservative in the face of rising terrorism and global uncertainty, and passed repressive laws to restrict personal freedoms and moral choices. The technologies that promised more reproductive liberation for those

wanting non-traditional sexual relationships struggled under the weight of regulation and religious condemnation.

But what mainstream culture fights against will inevitably find expression on the streets, in the black markets, and in the secret labs of people who will do anything for those desperate and rich enough to fund them. This movement has been dubbed *atrivita* -- "grey life" -- life hidden amongst the edges of outlawry.

The World

This is Earth, how it might turn out if new breakthroughs in reproductive and therapeutic biotechnology are pushed underground by legal restrictions. But the governments who fight human genetic engineering allow corporations to develop and patent techniques applied to crops, livestock, and disease control. The resulting explosion of gengineered species can sustain an ever-growing human population with ease, but only at the cost of becoming increasingly beholden to the biocorps.

The Developed World

Atrivita is a dark future to some, but average citizens in developed nations are little affected by the geopolitical and economic state of the world. Living standards are high, and most middle-class people don't miss the personal freedoms that have slowly been eroded, let alone the new possibilities that have not been granted over the past decades.

Throughout Europe, North America, and the developed Asia-Pacific nations, people are free to travel, gather, and protest, although security is heavy. Travelers and attendees at large events must pass biometric identity checks and a battery of scans designed to detect metallic, chemical, and -- most of all these days -- biological weapons.

Most citizens support the legal restrictions against cloning and human gengineering, so do not see these as onerous. The tragic examples of children with crippling diseases who could be saved by gengineered siblings, or those who die waiting for donated organ transplants instead of receiving a stem cell tissue engineered organ, are too few and too far between to concern the faceless majority who disallow such procedures. And those who express a desire to produce clones or adaptively engineer human germlines for the "benefit of humanity" are shouted down as ethically misguided.

Civil liberty action groups campaign against what they consider unnecessary restrictions on personal freedoms. Their tactics are generally public awareness campaigns, political lobbying, and peaceful protests. Occasionally a protest degenerates into violence as security personnel and protesters become overheated. A handful of groups engage in terrorism against government and corporate targets to further their cause. The media sensationalize the violent aspects and underplay the peaceful protests, which contributes to the general feeling that genetic liberty groups are radical extremists.

The Underworld

Below the average lifestyle lived by the silent masses is a seedy underworld populated by growing ranks of disaffected poor, unable to secure a job in a world becoming increasingly automated and turning to drink, drugs, and crime. Welfare payments are woefully inadequate to provide for the sheer number of unemployed, especially as many nations have reduced welfare budgets in order to finance increased security and law enforcement programs.

Many members of this lower class struggle along as best they can, taking menial labor when they can get it and begging when they can't. Others live a life of petty crime, stealing what they need to avoid starving or freezing to death.

Some people form organized gangs for mutual protection and resource sharing. Gangs can hit bigger targets than individuals and make away with more goods. Gang members can occasionally afford cheap biomods and frequently use enhancement drugs when they mount raids or attack other gangs in turf wars.

A few criminals form a core of organized crime that permeates all levels of society. A job as a hired thug or enforcer

is one of the most reliable pay packets on the streets. It also represents one of the few ways a person at this stratum of society can work his way up. By being tougher and smarter than the rabble, a thug can become a mid-level crime boss. The cream of the crop rise to manage national and international criminal syndicates. These Mr. Bigs can afford the best medical care and biomods that money can buy, so are frequently physically enhanced and receiving anti-agathic treatments.

The Third World

Life in the developing world is tough. Exploding population growth means ever more resources need to be put into food production. Although genetically engineered crops and livestock easily supply enough food, they are only available by paying biotech corporations for the privilege of growing them. Effective treatments for diseases that have plagued the developing world for millennia are also now available, but at a similar cost. With no other options, Third World nations are increasingly in debt and their populations remain desperately poor.

Only a lucky few are able to scrape together an education and make their way into professional careers. But multiplied by the enormous population base, this has generated a significant upper class, many of whom are now questioning the dependency of their nations on the existing biotechnology cartels. With what resources and knowhow they can muster, these crusaders are trying to set up gengineering labs of their own -- a move looked on with hostile eyes by the established corporations.

Space

Government-funded space exploration and colonization never recovered from the stagnation around the turn of the 21st century. A handful of commercial enterprises attempted to gain footholds in orbit, but it wasn't until Umbrium Corporation launched its successful space laboratory that others began to appreciate the true potential of a microgravity environment.

Umbrium developed small-scale biotech processes rather than attempting the more ambitious zero-gravity metallurgy programs of its competitors, which allowed it to turn a profit without investing in heavy lift launchers. It patented several microgravity gengineering techniques and new products such as isotropic bacteria-grown crystals impossible to produce on Earth. Other companies followed and now there is a small but thriving community of corporate research settlements in orbit, serviced by regular shuttle flights. With regular service came tourists, and a few corporations have built space hotels where the rich may spend time in orbit. It costs a fortune, but the views are worth it.

The next target is the moon, which beckons with minerals and helium-3 for research into fusion power. Nobody has yet returned there, but plans are on several drawing boards.

Technology

Atrivita is a mature TL9 world, with all appropriate technology from ***GURPS Ultra-Tech*** and this book available somewhere. This is not to say that such technology is *easily* available. Human biotech involving cloning or germline gengineering is LC0 and available only through black market channels or to secret government projects that all countries deny operating. Biomodification is also banned in many countries (LC0), although some use biomodified police and military forces, making biomods LC2.

The Destruction of Kinshasa

The worst biotech disaster in history precipitated the destruction of the neighboring cities of Kinshasa and Brazzaville two years ago. An experimental biological control lab accidentally released a gengineered virus designed to sterilize mosquitoes and thus wipe out malaria and other insect-borne diseases. It failed on two accounts: a natural mutation in the mosquito population quickly led to future generations being immune to the effect; and worse, the virus proved horrifically fatal to a large fraction of the human population because of susceptibility carried on a particular gene not identified during development.

With great reluctance and no other option, western powers agreed to sterilize the area using saturation bombing of fuel-air explosives, before the infection could escape and

Most non-human biotech items exist at their listed legality classes. The exception is any attempt to uplift animals by augmenting their intelligence, which is banned under a U.N. treaty. Many nations allow non-uplift experimentation on animals and some companies specialize in biomodded and gengineered animals. Besides changes to livestock for improved health and productivity, genetically modified working animals and pets are increasingly common. A typical enhanced beast of burden has ST 10% higher than average for its baseline species and +1 HT. Pets come in varieties ranging from glow-in-the-dark to miniature versions of large animals. Miniature versions of wild animals are often as aggressive as their unmodified counterparts, so they are kept more by an avant-garde subculture than mainstream families with children.

Illegal Biotech

Despite human cloning being illegal, there are many uses for it. With stem cell research stifled, it's almost easier to grow an entire body than just a spare organ for transplant. A clone can also be ready with fresh organs at any time, whereas a custom organ takes time to grow. The infonets circulate persistent rumors that high-profile political figures and celebrities maintain clone "brothers" in case of emergencies. The clones are treated well . . . until the original requires a spare part.

Clones of famous people are also big business for traders in human flesh. Prostitution rackets pay well for genetic material verified to be from celebrities. Some go as far as selling the resulting clones to rich buyers. Genesnatching has become a crime feared by the famous, and almost impossible to guard against while maintaining a normal lifestyle.

Organizations

Many of the government and corporate entities existing today still exist in the world of Atrivita. Real world names can be used to establish familiarity, while the following fictional organizations help to set the tone of the campaign.

Agrigene

ravage the rest of the world. Isolated cases who escaped the cities were quarantined. Six months later, with close monitoring of surrounding territory, the United Nations declared the region safe.

The drastic action attracted widespread condemnation, but the leaders who made the decision stood by it, presenting terrifying data on plague simulations supplied and verified by several prominent epidemiology research labs. They showed that the virus would likely have wiped out over half the world population within two years -- faster than any reasonable estimate for the development of a vaccine.

Major biotech corporations have used this event to criticize the efforts of developing countries to engineer their own biotechnology, claiming they lack the experience to handle it safely. Conspiracy theorists note that the entire incident appears calculated to boost the standing of the established biocorps while discrediting potential competition that could overthrow their dominance . . .

This multinational specializes in agricultural bioengineering. It is known for its genemod high-yield crops and livestock, as well as aggressive marketing policies in Third World countries.

Agrigene began as a small biotech concern in Sweden. It hit the big time in 2011 with a patented method for making crops drought-resistant. In a world starting to feel the effects of greenhouse warming, this attracted heavy investment and allowed the company to expand rapidly. It posted huge profits in the following years, built on a succession of proprietary breakthroughs with commercial plant and animal modifications.

The company is now the world's biggest agricultural biotech business. It has as many genetic patents as its top three competitors combined, and uses them to maintain an unassailable corporate position. Although it licences many of its enhanced productivity genemods, they typically contain hormone dependency sequences, and Agrigene maintains a monopoly on the production and distribution of the various enabling hormones.

This practice has resulted in a growing black market for cheap copies of Agrigene hormones, particularly in developing nations where law enforcement is lax. Agrigene uses its considerable international influence to pressure governments to crack down on the forgers. It's directors suspect some of the sophisticated synthesis labs are backed by competitors, and play games of industrial espionage to uncover the truth. Agrigene itself is the target of several

consumer groups concerned with its greedy marketing strategies.

Umbrium

This company made its fortune with microgravity gengineering and biological materials science. It operates a trio of orbital laboratories and several ground facilities. The materials it produces in space are ultrapure microbially grown crystals impossible to manufacture on Earth. These crystals are in demand for military grade electronics and weapons systems, forming the basis of the fastest and most hardened computer systems in the world.

Umbrium is now a leading microbial biotech firm, producing commercial microbes of all types. Directors deny the company has any military contracts to develop biowarfare agents.

United Nations Genetic Control Programme (UNGCP)

This specialized agency of the United Nations is an arm of the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention. It was established in 2005 soon after the outlawing of human cloning to enforce the ban. When artificial modification of the human genome was also banned in 2006, the UNGCP took responsibility for policing that as well.

Now, the UNGCP has three main branches: administration, investigation, and enforcement. The investigation and enforcement branches operate field agents, ostensibly at the discretion of the U.N. Security Council, although in practice senior UNGCP administration directs operations and they are seldom called to account. The agents -- commonly known as gene cops -- accumulate evidence of human bioengineering activities worldwide, and mount special operations to break up illegal cloning rackets, germline gengineering labs, and other "violations of the human genome."

The UNGCP keeps tabs on known genetic offenders, as well as people who have publicly expressed a desire for the technology. This includes people who have suffered personal tragedies due to the lack of availability of therapeutic gengineering techniques, as experience shows people in this group are statistically more likely to engage in militant civil rights activities.

The UNGCP is strongly supported by the United States, United Kingdom, Israel, the Vatican, most Muslim countries, and much of Africa and South America. Continental Europe is less enamored with the agency, but tolerates it as a necessary control against cloning.

COF

This is a consumer activist group dedicated to stopping the runaway use of genemod plants and animals. COF stands for *Consumers Opposed to Frankenfoods*, but the group is more commonly known by its initials -- spelled out by supporters, used as an acronym by detractors. The group operates in developed nations.

COF uses peaceful means to promote its agenda, involving consumer education and picketing of biotech corporations. Its educational material urges consumers to boycott genetically modified products in favor of natural ones. The major problem is that almost all food on the market is modified in some way, with the only alternatives being expensive produce grown by niche farmers or growing it yourself. Even people who agree with the sentiment find it difficult in practice.

The UNGCP keeps files on prominent COF leaders and members, but they are a relatively low priority for investigation. There are rumors that COF funds more militant groups, but publicly they maintain a clean profile.

Rhea Silvia

Rhea Silvia is an outlawed group which helps desperate people to find the expertise and technology they need for human therapeutic and reproductive cloning. It operates high quality black labs in several countries. Despite their

illegal nature, these labs are state of the art and employ brilliant biological and genetic engineers. In some Third World countries, Rhea Silvia operates behind a front of providing medical care to needy citizens, and provides it better than the government or legitimate aid agencies.

A militant arm of Rhea Silvia, nicknamed Romulus, engages in acts of terrorism and assassination targeted at the institutions and people who perpetuate the cloning ban. With its access to high levels of biotech, Romulus prefers genetically targeted viruses as weapons, but also uses more conventional methods such as firearms and explosives when an adequate genetic profile of the primary victim or victims is unavailable.

Conspiracy theorists persist in spreading rumors of a second, secret, branch of Rhea Silvia, which they call Remus. They allege that it consists of only a few members, who are insinuated into positions of power within major world governments and the United Nations. There they purportedly pursue agendas to destabilize the current doctrine that human biotechnology should remain banned.

Clinique Rouge

When people want illegal biomods or to produce clones, they seek out a black market clinic. One of the most highly regarded is the Clinique Rouge, begun in Marseille, France, but now with branches in several developed nations around the world. It is a high-class and very discreet operation, contactable only if one has the right connections on the streets. The Clinique has built its reputation on two pillars: impeccable work, and absolute secrecy about its client list.

Characters

Depending on the style of the campaign, suitable character types in Atrivita include the following:

Gene cops work for the UNGCP or affiliated federal agencies. A simple campaign can be played in a law-enforcement mode, in which heroic gene cops investigate truly heinous crimes such as cloning and gengineering people for use as slaves or replacement parts. The enemies can be mad individuals or secret programs run by ethically dubious corporations. This can lead into a campaign of moral exploration and discovery as the gene cops become aware of peaceful political campaigns in favor of human biotechnology and the reasons why some people want the freedom to pursue therapeutic gengineering. As the cops realize their world is not as black and white as they thought, they may be tempted to switch sides.

Bounty hunters are less sympathetic to the justifications of their targets, as they are only interested in doing the job of bringing them to justice. Freelance hunters lead an adventurous life, traveling the world in pursuit of prey and using investigative and infiltration techniques to gather intelligence before striking. Although less likely to consider the moral implications of their job, a campaign in which bounty hunters begin to support the campaign for genetic freedom would be interesting.

Corporate executives run the biotech companies that hold the world in the palm of their hands. Although an unsympathetic lot, an executive with more moral fiber than

Adventure Seeds

Sterile Crop Outrage

For millennia, farmers have been saving some of the seed from the previous crop to sow for the next one. Now, when they can afford to, they buy the latest gengineered seeds from biotech companies for greater yields and better pest resistance. But if they fall on hard times, they can still save seeds for the next crop, risking only being a year or two behind the latest developments.

But this is about to change. Agrigene's latest set of enhanced seeds contains a gene sequence that renders seeds of the next generation sterile. Once farmers switch to the new seeds, they will have no choice but to buy more every year, or have none. What's worse, Agrigene hasn't announced this until after hundreds of thousands of farmers across the developing world have grown the new seeds. Now, people are angry, from the farms of Bangladesh to the halls of the United Nations. Agents will be needed to maintain order against rioting, to investigate Agrigene, and to work out a solution to the problem before millions starve.

Genesnatchers

most would make a suitable protagonist. An interesting role would be the head of a small biotech company attempting to develop new techniques to feed the developing world without the attendant greed of the multinationals. This would naturally attract unwelcome interest from larger and more influential corporations who don't want their business undercut. Industrial espionage and intrigue can result. Another possibility is a biotech executive willing to push the envelope and develop life-saving human gengineering techniques in violation of UNGCP policies.

Bioengineers will either work on plants and animals, or risk stigmatization and legal repercussions by experimenting on human cells. Corporate gengineers may engage in field testing in agricultural regions, where locals will see them variously as heroes or scourges. Others will be attracted to illicit human engineering either by a desire to help individuals with nowhere else to go, or by simple greed. Some affiliate with groups like Rhea Silvia or the Clinique Rouge, while others go independent.

Surgeons are required to take care of the people who fall afoul of the tough life on the streets. With crime rampant, trauma surgery is a never-ending job, and surgeons can come into contact with people with all sorts of secrets. The pay is better doing black market biomods, though, and the working conditions might even be less dreadful.

Neo-Luddites support the bans on human biotech, which puts them in the mainstream in Atrivita. Some will go further and campaign against any form of genetic engineering, bringing them into conflict with biotech corporations and Third World governments. They may receive support from poor farmers keen to break the cycle of dependency on the corps.

A media celebrity has become aware that criminals have somehow managed to get hold of a sample of her tissue, despite her paranoid precautions against this. She puts a huge bounty on the genesnatchers and suitable evidence that her sample hasn't been copied. Bounty hunters (and any tempted gene cops) follow a twisting trail of clues, meeting a chain of contacts along the way. When they finally reach the culprits, they discover no samples matching the celebrity. They can either give up on collecting the reward, or attempt to gain a sample some other way . . .

Outbreak

Something odd is happening in Copenhagen. Media reports indicate a strange new disease is filling the hospitals, and many patients are dying. This is no variant influenza from an Asian melting pot, and suspicions begin to climb that it is a bioengineered weapon. The United Nations dispatches epidemiologists and bioengineers to collect data and analyze the plague, while shutting down most travel out of the city and surrounding countryside.

Is it a new mutation of an old bacterial enemy of mankind, or indeed a bioweapon? And if so, who is responsible and why target Copenhagen? There are plenty of opportunities for danger in the field and machinations in the halls of power as the U.N. team races to contain the outbreak and prevent another Kinshasa -- this time on the European continent.

Genetically engineered individuals are rare in Atrivita. Nobody expects to meet a clone or gengineered person, and most would react with revulsion if they learned they had. Although it is not a crime to be cloned or genetically altered, such people are stigmatized by society if recognized, and have a hard time passing security identification checks and holding jobs. Some try to live normally while guarding a terrible secret, while others turn to crime.

The Great Work

Variant Alchemy Rules for GURPS Fourth Edition

by James L. Cambias

Alchemy is the ancient study of the transformation of materials. It was born in Hellenistic Egypt; the name "alchemy" is from the Arabic *al-Khem,* referring to the Egyptian name for their land. It was always an odd mix of genuine practical chemistry, some semi-secret goldsmithing technique, and a growing accumulation of occult baggage.

In fantasy fiction, alchemists create magical potions, a tradition continued by the alchemy rules in ***GURPS Magic.*** But the focus of historical alchemical practice, at least in the Medieval and Renaissance West, was the creation of the "Stone," sometimes known as the Philosopher's Stone. The Stone was a kind of ultra-purified matter which could "perfect" other matter -- making metals into more noble forms, healing living things, and generally reversing what we now call entropy. At times it was identified with the Holy Grail, or with the process of spiritual enlightenment.

Alchemy was always considered a process of *rediscovery* or recovery of knowledge -- alchemists believed all the important lore was given to Adam at the time of the Creation, and that over time it had been lost. The most ancient sources were therefore considered the most useful and authoritative. One consequence was that many alchemists adopted ancient pseudonyms for their writings. They used names like Moses, Cleopatra, and (most importantly) Hermes Trimegistus.

These variant rules are an attempt to import more of the flavor of historical alchemy into the ***GURPS*** magical system. Gamemasters can use them in place of the "Exotic Preparations" discussed on pages 220-221 of ***GURPS Magic.***

Creating the Stone

The heart of alchemy is creating the Philosopher's Stone. Creating the Stone requires Alchemy skill and the Magical Aptitude advantage. Gamemasters may opt to allow non-mages skilled in Alchemy to pursue the Great Work, but should beware the potential consequences if the knowledge becomes widespread -- if *anyone* can multiply and transmute metals, the nature of wealth in the game world will change dramatically. The alchemist's skill is modified by any Magery levels he may possess, and by the local mana level.

The Great Work is a lengthy process, with several stages. Each stage has an associated skill penalty, and the stages must be performed in order. Each successive ritual assumes that Stone has already undergone all the previous stages. If an alchemist's Stone is lost or destroyed, he must begin again at the very beginning.

If the alchemist fails in his attempt to complete one stage of the Work, he cannot try again until he has increased his Alchemy skill. Unless he suffers a critical failure, any existing early-stage Stone remains intact and can be used in future attempts.

The stages described here are an attempt to find a gameable middle ground between historical alchemical practice and genre fantasy convention. The powers of early-stage Stones are not strictly historical, although alchemists were so vague and contradictory in their ideas of what the Stone was and could do that it would be hard to prove this description *wrong*.

Poison Quelling Stone (Alchemy skill at -4)

This is the first stage of the Great Work, and creates a Stone which can render any poison inert. It takes 12 hours to make, and requires $1,000 in materials. If successful, the alchemist can use the Stone to neutralize an equal weight of poison on contact (biological toxins break down harmlessly, poison elements or radioactive materials simply

disintegrate, their component atoms flying off at high speed to get away from the stone). A Poison-Quelling Stone normally weighs 1 ounce; making a bigger one imposes an additional -1 skill penalty and an extra $1,000 cost for each ounce of size, though the time remains constant.

A failed skill roll to create a Poison Quelling Stone simply wastes time and ingredients. A *critical* failure produces a stone which is deadly poison to the touch.

A Poison-Quelling Stone is worth $10,000 on the open market in a magically-aware society. Where magic is secret or unknown, it would be worth $20,000 or more.

Transmutation (Alchemy skill at -6)

The second stage of the Work creates a Stone which can transform one metal to another. The process of creating the Transmuting Stone takes 5 days and costs $5,000, and must be performed upon an existing Poison-Quelling Stone.

If successful, the Transmuting Stone can convert a weight of metal equal to its own weight into a more valuable form. The Stone and the metal must be placed together for 24 hours, along with materials costing $100. Each transmutation takes the metal one step up in the sequence of lead, tin, iron, copper, silver, mercury, gold. For simplicity's sake, assume the metal increases in value by a factor of 5 at each step, starting at about 1 cent for an ounce of lead. The ancient alchemists did not know about radioactive elements or things like titanium, so assume the process won't work on other metals. A Transmuting Stone retains its poison-quelling qualities.

Failure to create a Transmuting Stone leaves the alchemist with a functional Poison-Quelling Stone. Critial failure produces a Stone which transmutes metals *down* the value sequence, turning gold into silver, copper into iron, and lead into useless slag.

In fantasy settings a Transmuting Stone is worth $50,000. In nonmagical settings it would be worth at least $100,000.

Multiplying Metals (Alchemy skill at -8)

This operation is the third stage of the Work and creates a stone which can instil metals with a kind of living power, so that they grow. Creating the Multiplying Stone costs $10,000 and the operation must be performed on a Transmuting Stone. It takes at least 2 months of constant work to create.

A Multiplying Stone has all the virtues of a Transmuting Stone, but can also be used to make metals grow and increase in weight. When kept together with a Multiplying Stone and nourished with materials costing $100, metals will gain in weight, adding the Stone's weight every week. So an ounce of gold kept with a Multiplying Stone weighing an ounce would add an ounce of weight per week. *This* is the real payoff for alchemists trying to make money -- some of the more extravagant simply keep a Multiplying Stone with a seed of gold and harvest the growth every few days. (Note that at this point the character should probably buy the Income advantage.)

A Multiplying Stone also transmutes and neutralizes poison. A critical failure in creating a Multiplying Stone results in a *destroying* stone, which disintegrates all metal within 5 yards over the course of 24 hours.

In a fantasy game world a Multiplying Stone would be worth $100,000; its value in a non-magical world is whatever the alchemist cares to charge.

Other Operations

In addition to creating the Stone there are related operations of great value to the alchemist. Most of these require a Stone at some point in its process of creation.

Gem Healing (no skill penalty)

This is the art of "healing" flawed gems, adulterated metals, or discolored pearls. It takes at least 10 hours to perform properly, and about $500 worth of alchemical materials. If successful, it increases the value of an item by 5% per point of success on the skill roll. Obviously, gem healing has no effect on flawless gems and pure metals. Critical failure destroys the item.

Universal Medicine (Alchemy skill at -6)

This operation uses a Transmuting Stone to create a cure for all diseases which also arrests the process of aging. One dose requires ingredients costing $1,000, which must be kept with a Transmuting Stone and subjected to a process taking at least 1 week to complete. If successful, the medicine instantly cures any disease the patient could possibly recover from normally, and gives him a roll of HT plus the margin of success of the alchemist's skill roll to recover from otherwise incurable illnesses like AIDS or cancer. Even if he is not cured, those diseases make no progress for HT months. Moreover, the patient does not age for HT months.

On a critical failure the Universal Medicine operation has created a deadly poison with no antidote.

A dose of Universal Medicine is worth $5,000 in a fantasy world, $50,000 or more in a non-magical setting.

Revivification (Alchemy skill at -8)

This somewhat abhorrent process uses a Multiplying Stone to restore life to dead flesh. It requires a Stone, a body, and materials costing about $1,000 (though anyone with a Multiplying Stone can laugh at the expense). The operation takes a week of intense work. If successful, it restores life to the body, but does *not* restore the original spirit or soul. Performing a Summon ritual at the same time *can* bring the soul back to the body, and if the spirit of the dead person happens to be around during the ritual, it can reenter its old flesh at the completion of the operation.

Without a spirit the revived body is physically as it was at the time of death and mentally like a newborn infant, with an IQ of 3d-2. If the alchemist gets a critical success on the Revivification operation, the body is restored to full health; otherwise it is still afflicted by whatever caused death.

Note that modern embalmed corpses are often missing parts and are full of toxic fluid. Unless the body can be *completely* restored, with a successful Surgery roll to patch up damage and some means (possibly a Poison Quelling Stone) to remove preservatives, the body cannot be restored to life.

On a critical failure, revivification either destroys the corpse completely or (at the GM's option) creates a ravening undead monster. Gamemasters may wish to require the alchemist to make a Fright Check to determine the psychological effect of all this messing about with corpses.

In a fantasy setting, the process of Revivification costs $25,000. In non-magical settings, the alchemist can charge at least $40,000.

Creation of Life (Alchemy skill at -9)

This operation also uses the Multiplying Stone to create life from unliving matter. The alchemist combines various liquids (including blood and semen), in a complex procedure costing about $5,000. The resulting mix is then "quickened" with a Multiplying Stone. The preparation takes at least a day to perform. The quickened mixture must then incubate over a period of 1 month, and must be kept at body temperature. The result is a homonculus -- a little humanoid weighing about 10 lbs. (For a larger homonculus, more Stones or a larger one are required). The appearance of the homonculus depends on the margin of success, ranging from a hideous little monster to a perfect miniature human. On a failure the ingredients fail to coalesce into living matter. On a critical failure the homonculus is a monster with a venomous bite and total instinctive hatred for its creator. On a critical success the homonculus grows and develops like a human baby, though faster, reaching adult size by 1 year of age.

The newly created homonculus has ST 1d, DX and HT 3d, and IQ 2d plus 1 for each point by which the alchemist made his skill roll (to a maximum of 14). They learn quickly (adding 1 skill point per week, usually starting with language).

Despite its greater complexity and importance, the creation of life isn't a very good way to make money. In a fantasy setting an alchemist can charge $10,000 for the procedure; in a non-magical world it may be hard to convince anyone it's possible to create life at all, but a homonculus might fetch up to $20,000 as a curiosity.

The Elixir of Immortality (Alchemy skill at -10)

This extremely potent medicine is made by improving a dose of Universal Medicine with exposure to a Multiplying Stone. The entire process takes 1 week and requires $1,000 of additional ingredients. If successful, it produces a single dose of Elixir. The Elixir is incredibly powerful: a dose instantly heals all damage, cures all diseases, and starts a process of regeneration lasting a month. Over the course of that month the patient regrows all lost body parts, and loses 1d times 5 years of biological age, (the process never "youthens" a patient below an apparent age of 20). Any improvement in the character's abilities must be paid off in character points.

A critical success creates an Elixir which allows the patient to purchase the Unaging advantage without any further doses. It essentially "cures" the body of getting older. A critical *failure* destroys the Stone used in the creation and produces a deadly poison.

One dose of Elixir is worth $30,000 in a fantasy setting, and pretty much whatever the alchemist wants to charge in a non-magical world.

Personal and Spiritual Alchemy

Alchemy has also been described as the process of personal purification and illumination. Study of the esoteric knowledge and philosophical principles embodied in alchemical operations can help the alchemist shed his worldly vices and gain new insights.

After mastering each new alchemical operation, the alchemist can roll against his Alchemy skill (modified by Magic Aptitude) to see if his new understanding of the nature of the universe has brought him greater spiritual enlightenment. Each successive stage allows the alchemist to purchase Advantages reflecting his spiritual improvement from the following list: Blessed, Channelling, Charisma, Healing, Intuition, Magery, Medium, Oracle, Racial Memory, Reawakened, Serendipity, Spirit Empathy, or Unfazeable. The advanges have their normal point cost; at the GM's option the alchemist may go into "experience debt" to purchase them. After his seventh success the alchemist can become Illuminated or gain True Faith.

Failure means the alchemist must wait until he successfully completes another new operation before trying again. Re-doing operations already mastered give no new knowledge. On a *critical* failure, the alchemist has gained a *false* understanding, which can lead to corruption and madness. Consult the Spiritual Purification Critical Failure table (see box). Disadvantages acquired this way can only be bought off when the alchemist *succeeds* at his next spiritual purification attempt, and only one disadvantage can be bought off per success.

If the alchemist has mastered all alchemical operations, he can make an attempt at spiritual improvement every time he increases his Alchemy skill level.

Spiritual Purification Critical Failure Table

This determines the negative effects of a flawed enlightenment. Roll 1d and add 1 for every previous failure on the path to spiritual purification.

1-4:	Gain one negative Quirk or Incompetence with a skill.
5-6:	Gain one of the following disadvantages: Callous, Loner, or Selfish.
7:	Gain one of: Bad Temper, Bloodlust, Bully, Cowardice, Jealousy, Miserliness, or Paranoia.
8 or more:	Gain one of: Alcoholism, Chronic Depression, Greed, On

Adventure Seeds

Great Workers

The most obvious adventure seed is for a PC alchemist to attempt the Great Work himself and encounter difficulties -- rivals trying to copy his research, greedy outsiders trying to profit from his work, a conspiracy of alchemists trying to keep the secret, etc. While in occult tradition alchemy doesn't require any particularly exotic materials, Gamemasters should feel free to include a few rare ingredients requiring side-quests to acquire.

Romancing the Stone

A Stone is a valuable object, and even the rumor of one attracts thieves and opportunists of all types. Somehow word has gotten out that one of the PCs is the owner of a Transmuting or Multiplying Stone. Crooks want to steal it, kings want to buy it, and other alchemists are on the warpath. Can the PCs survive and find a way to profit from the situation?

The Big Score

A Stone doesn't have to be real to create wealth. A clever con man with a line of alchemical patter and some stage-magic tricks is trying to convince a greedy nobleman that he can create the Stone -- *if* the nobleman can provide certain very expensive ingredients for the work. Will the PCs expose the fraud, or join forces with the crook?

the Edge, or Sadism.

New disadvantages do *not* give the character additional points to spend; they merely reduce the overall character value. They can exceed the disadvantage limit for the campaign.

Where Would We Be Without Absolutes?

In hindsight, I wonder why moral absolutes became so ingrained in the gaming world.

By moral absolutes, I'm talking about, of course, the alignment system, as first introduced by **Dungeons & Dragons** umpity-jillion years ago, and whose legacy continues to affect even those games that lack such systems.

But from one point of view, think about how unlikely the ingrained nature of this morality system is: RPGs evolved out of the fantasy wargaming experience, which itself evolved out of the non-fantasy wargaming experience. Now, wargames are quite possibly the purest example of non-moral gaming in existence; players are expected to choose one of two sides in a conflict that quite possibly has some kind of hindsight moral assessment, and play them without the moral baggage associated with that conflict. After all, it would be impossible to play as the Germans in **Axis & Allies** if you felt that you were forced to play a leader that is darn-near the embodiment of "evil" to most people.

(Did I just invoke Godwin's Law in my own column?!)

No, wargames are just like any other game -- even among those where you play a "character" -- where the morality of the participants is never even called to mind. After all, when you're playing *Life* or *Monopoly,* you may do actions that are harsh or generous, kind or cruel. But I don't think anyone would ever label the characters portrayed in such games as definitively "evil" or "good"; you're just playing the game, even if you are forcing some other player into bankruptcy.

But RPGs are different; in an RPG, it's entirely possible to play a character who is evil to his core and -- at least in the old days -- *knows* he's evil. (How common is it for anyone to reach the same conclusion that society has of being "evil"?)

In trying to theorize the likely progression for how this focus on pigeonholing morality, I suspect we have both Tolkien and George Lucas to blame (or thank, if you like that sort of thing). The characters of Tolkien's books are almost entirely divisible into standard good/evil categories, with scant few in between. It seems quite likely that gamers seeking to replicate the most-revered fantasy series would do so with that sensibility firmly in mind. Likewise as **Dungeons & Dragons** started gaining popularity, the omnipresence of the *Star Wars* phenomenon would, again, ensure that many of those trying this new-fangled game would do so with a black-and-white morality firmly in mind.

Given the likelihood of any fantasy game having strong ties to Tolkien, perhaps this moral absolutism was inevitable. But perhaps not.

Maybe if **Traveller** had somehow become the standard roleplaying game, the moral outlook of RPGs would be different. According to the keeper of all human knowledge -- [Wikipedia](#) -- **Traveller** debuted in 1977, which is the same year the first *Star Wars* movie appeared. Despite that, the **Traveller** universe has a much more realistic view of human morality than . . . well, many other RPGs. Humans will lie, cheat, steal, and blow stuff up for gold and glory, just as we've done for the past 10,000 years or so of human history.

Or perhaps if RPGs had evolved more out of the live-action murder mystery parties which became especially popular in the 1980s, things might be different. After all, in most of those established scenarios almost every player has a character with *some* skeletons in the closet, and hardly anyone in those games would be classified as "good." Indeed, such moral distinctions would be superfluous and unnecessary; the character's moral outlook has no bearing on the group's interactions -- all that's ultimately important is Whodunnit?

I find it curious because, in many ways, the legacy of RPGs' moral assumptions -- primarily as embodied by the alignment system from the original **Dungeons & Dragons** and its ilk -- have lingered with most RPGs even today. Consider the **World of Darkness;** this is a game system that seems as morally gray as any that's been published, yet almost each game under its banner has, as part of its core, a judgment of the morality of the players' characters. Get too evil and you turn into a slathering hell-beast or even a lobbyist. Now, while I think these are fine systems (and, in

many ways, I approve), I can also envision how such a mechanic might hamper gameplay.

I think the legacy of that initial choice for a moral assessment has touched practically every other RPG. People with even a smattering of gaming experience (i.e. "played **Dungeons & Dragons** a few times") will be familiar with the alignment system, and among most hard-core gamers I've seen the existence -- or lack thereof -- of a morality system is usually one of the top 10 defining features of a new RPG. (As in, "This game is cool because you're not locked into the restrictions of a morality system!") This outlook classification even spills over into other pursuits; many computer RPGs and MMORPGs have morality systems of various sorts as well. (However, I note with some interest that the MMORPG **World of Warcraft** -- perhaps more synonymous with "RPGs" in the minds of many than **Dungeons & Dragons** ever will be -- sidesteps the issue entirely. There isn't a good/evil distinction in a mechanical sense, and it's seldom addressed in-game outside of some flavor-text handwaving. Sure, some sides may cackle about committing genocide or kicking puppies, but the game also ensures that each side can -- and does -- think of itself as the "right" one. And, while the player's character may be expected to go out and kick puppies or slaughter nameless hordes of presumably sentient minions, most folks in towns or parties will still treat you the same way: "Yes, we think all warlocks are demon-dealing soul-suckers. Anyway, Mr. Warlock, here's our selection of potions . . ." The closest **World of Warcraft** has is the idea of factions. These factions function more or less how they do in the real world; if you're a 16th-century privateer who's charged by the British to sink French ships, then the Brits will like you while the French will shoot on site . . . morality of either side be darned.)

I find this kind of "What if?" contemplation about RPGs -- while dangerously close to navel-gazing -- to be fascinating in other ways. After all, what would an RPG resemble that has never taken into consideration the shoebox morality of its participants? (We had an interesting article a few months ago called "[The Many Faces of Evil](#)" that deals with alternative morality assumptions, especially for how they apply to paladins of a **d20 System** game.) One of the more interesting moral twists in any computer I ever played was the awkwardly titled **Ultima VII Part II: The Serpent's Isle** In that one, the opening conflict established in the in-game documentation details the last words of a falling citadel as they are under assault by the forces of Order. Unlike previous games in the series, the ultimate conflict was about the restoration of balance between Chaos and Order.

So, in a nutshell, if you're looking for some means of adding an interesting twist to an otherwise humdrum campaign -- as a player *or* GM -- consider your options for morality. What if a world knew, with absolute certainty, that there was a moral Good and Evil (a la Terra/The Nile Empire from **Torg**)? What if a culture believed themselves to be evil; how would that affect their outlook or actions? (This isn't too far from some Christian views of a post-Fall humanity.) What if the conflict between two nations in a game was ultimately revealed to be a conflict of moralities (such as Humans' desire to live in peace versus Goblins' belief that it is immoral to allow land to go un- or underutilized)? What if a slightly screwball *character* believed in an absolute morality system, to the point of assigning it game-like attributes? ("I could break into this building, but doing so would place my Conscience rating in jeopardy.") What if unanswered rhetorical questions were seen as immoral, and punishable by dea

The Omniscient Eye

Why Is The Sky Green (On Caphelon IV)?

I've designed a world with a breathable nitrogen/oxygen atmosphere and tropical climate. Is the sky necessarily going to be blue (cloud cover permitting), and if not, what other colours might be possible?
--Stephen Dedman

Ah, the Omniscient Eye detects shades of the Classic Question, "Why is the sky blue?" In fact, that is the best place for us to start answering your more general question.

Most people who try to answer the Classic Question seriously begin by saying "Rayleigh scattering," and promptly stop there as the queryer's eyes glaze over. The Omniscient Eye's job is not done, however, until this arcane effect is explained in terms simple enough for mortals to understand.

Rayleigh Scattering for Non-Omniscients

First, consider where any light that we see in the sky actually comes from. If we look at the sun, the light is obviously coming directly from the sun (though don't try this at home; you will damage your eyes). If we look elsewhere during the day, we normally see fairly bright light in a familiar shade of sky blue. Where is this light coming from?

We know from our experience at night that there isn't anything that bright beyond the atmosphere (with a very few exceptions, which we'll get to later). So that blue sky light must be coming from the atmosphere itself. Why is the atmosphere aglow like that? Rayleigh scattering . . . stay with me now . . .

Rayleigh scattering is, in simple terms, the bouncing of light off the molecules of a gas. It's called "scattering" because, unlike reflection off a mirror, the light bounces off the gas molecules at a wide range of angles. Most light passing through the atmosphere doesn't scatter, but enough does that any point in the atmosphere illuminated by the sun is effectively emitting a significant amount of light in all directions. So when you look into the sky, the light reaching your eyes has come from the sun via bouncing off one (or more) molecules of the atmosphere.

This is why the daytime sky is bright -- so far, so good. But why is it blue, when the sun is a pale yellow color? The answer lies in the arcane physics of Rayleigh scattering, the gist of which is that light of shorter wavelengths is more likely to scatter than light of longer wavelengths. *Much* more likely. Long wavelength light is red, while short wavelength light is blue. So when you look into the sky and see all that scattered light, most of it is blue.

Scientifically savvy readers will now be thinking along the following lines: Okay, but I know that violet light is even shorter in wavelength than blue light, so therefore it should be scattered more than blue light. So most of the light I see scattered from the atmosphere should be violet, and the sky should look purple!

The first part of this reasoning is valid -- violet light does indeed scatter more than blue light. But this logic falls down in two other places: First, the sun does not emit equal intensities of light across the spectrum. The intensity of sunlight peaks in the yellow, with a bit less green and orange, significantly less blue and red, and very little violet by comparison. The amount of violet in sunlight is so little that, even though more strongly scattered, its intensity is roughly equal to that of the scattered blue light. The second complicating factor is that the human eye is much more sensitive to blue light than violet light. Given equal intensities across this part of the color spectrum, we tend to see the result as just blue, rather than a violet-blue mixture.

Now let's see how Rayleigh scattering applies to sunsets (and sunrises, though the Eye does not deign to get up that

early). At sunset, sunlight must pass through a much thicker layer of atmosphere to reach your eyes because of the low angle of incidence. This means incoming light is more likely to scatter, and to do so multiple times. The "wide range of angles" of scattering mentioned above is actually weighted such that it is twice as likely for light to be scattered by very small angles as it is to be scattered by angles around 90 degrees. The result of this is that blue light, which tends to scatter much more frequently, ends up scattered by greater accumulated angles than red light. So when looking at a sunset, most of the light near the sun is this minimally scattered red light, and as you look further from the sun it fades through orange and yellow back to blue, creating the classic red and gold sunsets we know and love.

Scattered Atmospheres

This all assumes our familiar Earth atmosphere. The amount of Rayleigh scattering depends very strongly on the size of the scattering particles. Nitrogen and oxygen molecules are close to the same size, so changing the ratios while keeping a breathable atmosphere won't have much effect. The inert gas argon, however, has atoms small enough that if you used it as a buffer gas instead of nitrogen, the amount of Rayleigh scattering would be roughly halved. If you reduce the amount of scattering, somewhat counterintuitively you actually make the sky a deeper, richer shade of blue. Although the amount of scattered blue light is less, the amount of scattered green, yellow, and red light is less still, so the color of the sky becomes darker and moves toward the violet end of the spectrum. You can confirm this effect yourself: the amount of Rayleigh scattering decreases when the sun is lower in the sky (less incoming light means less scattering) or when you are above a significant portion of the atmosphere (in a plane) -- in both cases the sky above looks darker and bluer, even shading into purple.

On the other hand, you can increase the amount of scattering by adding larger gas molecules to the atmosphere. Carbon dioxide molecules are about twice as big as those of nitrogen, and scatter light over 100 times as efficiently. Adding a significant amount of CO_2 will scatter more blue light, but also *much* more of the longer wavelength colors, resulting in the sky color becoming paler and shifting toward green. So green skies are a possibility, but they will be pale compared to even the palest tropical blue skies of Earth, rather than vivid. With a lot of CO_2 (or even larger molecules such as sulfuric acid), you can produce the pale yellow skies seen in some NASA photos from the surface of Mars, but unfortunately this renders your atmosphere unbreathable.

While mentioning Mars, another factor in determining the color of the sky is particulate matter such as dust or smoke. Many of us are familiar with the effects of these as a brown haze of pollution. These particles also scatter light in a similar way to Rayleigh scattering. Usually smog lies below the bulk of the bright blue atmosphere above, so the originally blue light we see coming through it is reddened, producing that murky brown color. At sunset, the already reddish light is reddened further, which can produce gloriously broad and colorful vistas. The Eye remembers when the great volcano Krakatoa (west of Java, not east as some B-grade movie makers would have you believe) exploded, lifting several cubic miles of ash into the sky. For years thereafter, sunsets as far away as England and Nova Scotia were stained red by the dust encircling the globe. Younger readers may recall a similar effect after the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines in 1991.

A world with a breathable atmosphere but frequent explosive volcanic activity (or dust storms, such as on Mars) may have a more or less permanent layer of globe-encircling ash or dust, serving to redden the sky. In this way you can have pink or brown skies, although the effect on the lungs of colonists may be harsh without filter masks.

The Goddess of the Dawn

Scattering is not the only atmospheric effect that colors skies. Stars spew out an unending stream of charged elementary particles. Earth's magnetic field catches the ones that come from our sun and funnels them toward the poles. There, the particles hit the upper atmosphere and excite atmospheric oxygen and nitrogen molecules, which glow in characteristic green and red. This lights up the polar night skies with the phenomenon known as the aurora.

Auroras are not visible in daylight, however. Researchers long believed that auroras occurred just as frequently in daylight, but were simply not bright enough to be seen. Recent results indicate that this might not be the case -- aurora

formation correlates with a drop in the electrical conductivity in the ionosphere, which happens mostly on winter nights when the upper atmosphere cools down.

That is Earth though. It is conceivable that solar activity and ionospheric conditions are perfect on your world to produce bigger and brighter auroras with regularity. If the world's magnetic field is weak or non-existent, the incoming solar wind would simply blast down on the entire daylight side, potentially triggering sky-wide auroras all day long. The shifting red and green glowing curtains covering the sky could overpower or blend with the passive color produced by Rayleigh scattering, to produce some truly eerie skies. Potential settlers might, however, have to build settlements reinforced with radiation protection, to avoid damage from those incoming solar particles.

Different Worlds, Different Suns

Moving beyond the atmosphere itself, all of these scattering effects will produce different results if the incoming solar spectrum is different to that of our Sun. Stars come in a variety of "spectral types," with which some readers may be familiar. If your planet orbits a bluer star than our sun, the default sky color shifts toward the blue end of the spectrum. Go far enough and you will get those violet skies mentioned earlier. The problem here is one of stellar and planetary evolution. Blue stars have short lives compared to our sun -- tens of millions rather than billions of years. Most scientists consider this time too short to generate planets and have them around long enough to evolve life. And life will be necessary on your planet to generate that oxygen atmosphere. So a naturally occurring nitrogen-oxygen planet with a violet sky is unlikely, although a terraformed or constructed world is possible if you want to invoke Precursors or extant technology suitable for the job.

Stars redder than our sun have longer lives, so evolving life is not an issue. As the amount of blue in a star's spectrum decreases, its planets' skies will become less blue and more red, shifting through green and yellow along the way. So yes, you can have a bright green sky, and the way to do it is to make the sun redder! (It sounds odd, but if you knew nothing about Earth except that it had a yellow sun and a nitrogen atmosphere, what color would you have guessed its skies would be?)

Outside Influences

Now we can discuss those exceptions to the statement that nothing beyond the daytime sky is bright enough to be seen through it. (The Omniscient Eye never forgets a promise made early in an article.) The sun is the obvious exception, but there is also the moon . . . and Venus. If you know exactly where to look, you can see Venus in full daylight, though its small apparent size and barely-greater-than-daylight brightness make it difficult to spot. Now imagine if there was something big, bright, and colorful filling your world's sky.

One thing that might come to mind is imagining that your world orbits not a star, but a gas giant that itself orbits a star. (The Omniscient Eye has discussed this very situation before.) Gas giants are bright, by virtue of reflecting much of their star's light, and come in many colors. In our own solar system, Neptune is a rich blue, Uranus

Sky Color Summary

Condition	Effect on Sky Color
Thinner atmosphere	Darker, more blue
Thicker atmosphere	Paler, more red
Lower atmospheric molecular weight	Darker, more blue
Higher atmospheric molecular weight	Paler, more red
Dust or pollution	Reddish tint overlaid
Bluer star	More blue
Redder star	More red

while (kiss(sky);) do excuse(me);

a pale green, Saturn yellow, and Jupiter is spectacularly banded with shades of white, orange, brown, blue, and red. From typical distances that a large world might orbit it, a gas giant would be easily visible in the daylight sky. But how much of the sky would it fill?

From the orbit of Jupiter's innermost large moon, Io, Jupiter subtends an angle of 19°. Our moon subtends half a degree in Earth's sky, so from Io, Jupiter looks 38 times bigger than that in diameter. Impressive, but not enough to fill more than a fraction of the sky. That's also a little close to be considered a safe world for colonizing, because of radiation and tidal forces from the gas giant. From the safer distance of Ganymede, Jupiter subtends a mere 7°. So a gas giant in your world's sky could provide some interesting accent, but won't dominate the color of your sky.

We can say the same for any potential large colorful moon of your world if it's in a more standard stellar orbit. Our own moon is close to the upper limit in size you could reasonably expect. So although a large moon might add color to your daytime skies, it won't be more than spot color.

The next candidate object for brightening your sky is a planetary ring system. These exist around all the gas giants in our solar system, but around none of the terrestrial planets. It might seem then that having such an interesting object around your inhabitable world is unlikely. Don't despair!

Current theories of planetary formation indicate that ring systems are relatively short-lived phenomena, lasting maybe a hundred million years before dissipating. The most likely method of formation is when gravitational interactions push a moon inside the planet's Roche limit -- the orbital distance at which a large object will be pulled apart by the planet's tidal force. You don't need a very large object either; Saturn's rings, despite their spectacular appearance, have a total mass less than a thousandth that of Earth's moon. There are plenty of objects big enough out in a typical planetary system -- all you need to do is get one close enough to your inhabitable world. The Roche limit of Earth is one tenth the size of Saturn's, so all you need to do is push a small moon 10 times closer. This indicates that, in rough terms, a ring system around a terrestrial world is around 10 times less likely than one around a gas giant. So it's not too much of a stretch to imagine inhabitable worlds with rings.

Rings are certainly bright enough to be seen in daylight, reflecting incoming sunlight. They would look largest from high latitudes, arcing across the entire sky from horizon to horizon in bands of color. As you move to lower latitudes, the rings would climb higher in the sky and become thinner, until they all but vanish at the equator. In reflection, rings are likely to be the muted yellow and brown colors we observe in Saturn's ring system. If the sun passes behind the rings, it will be filtered through the particles, which could well be small enough to produce scattering effects and reddening of the light.

Finally, what if large regions of space around your entire planetary system are full of bright objects near enough to fill the sky? We call such objects nebulae. Any web search will produce [hundreds](#) of [beautiful images](#) of [nebulae](#). There are several different types of bright nebula. We can ignore planetary nebulae and supernova remnants, since they are small and their creation necessarily destroys the only star with planets near enough to have a nebula-lit sky. That leaves reflection nebulae (clouds of gas and dust lit by the glow of nearby stars) and H II regions (areas of glowing ionized hydrogen), both of which can be hundreds of parsecs across -- large enough to encompass several star systems. Stars in such regions tend to be young, short-lived blue stars, but it's possible for a longer-lived yellow or red sun to drift into a large nebula, granting its planets spectacular skies of almost any color you can imagine. The sky of such a planet would have bright colored filaments and ribbons weaving across it, that rotate with the stars.

We've come a long way considering only the realms of hard science. There are many more possibilities for space opera and outright fantasy skies. Of course you can justify any color sky you like in such genres. You could even use the sky as an indicator of campaign mood or a [canvas for omens](#). The Omniscient Eye is happy to provide the science. It's up to you to provide the creativity.

--David Morgan-Mar

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@yahoogroups.com, and the Omniscient Eye might answer it!

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Review

Secrets of Japan: A Guide To Roleplaying In Present Day Japan (for *Call of Cthulhu*)

Published by **Chaosium, Inc.**

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Cartography by Michael Dziesinki & Drashi Khendup

360-page b&w softcover; $34.95

With *Secrets of Japan: A Guide To Roleplaying In Present Day Japan,* Chaosium journeys to the far east to offer an exploration of the modern nation of Japan and its singular culture, placing it under the lens of the Lovecraftian Mythos for *Cthulhu Now,* the contemporary incarnation of *Call of Cthulhu*. Clearly penned by a knowledgeable and dedicated Japan-o-phile, the weighty tome serves up a rich cultural feast detailing the peoples, places, faiths, beliefs, and organizations of Japan. It is designed to introduce both the occidental reader and the occidental player character to the country, as well as enabling the creation and roleplaying of Japanese characters within their own country. Naturally it delves into the occult, in particular approaching the Mythos from a non-Western standpoint. Finally, it is intended to work as the start of a series of supplements detailing "Cthulhu Japan," yet neither of the hinted at *Secrets of Japan: Investigator's Companion* and *Japanese Dreamlands* supplements have appeared.

For a contemporary Chaosium release, this is a surprisingly good-looking book. It employs a diverse range of art styles, including Manga, photographs, and even chibi-style strip cartoons entitled "Cthulhu Sushi" as well as the more traditional RPG and Japanese classical art styles. Every page is watermarked with an image of Cthulhu done in brush strokes and any supplementary information is placed effectively in white text on black boxes. Unfortunately several of the book's maps are as badly handled, as usual. Fortunately the supplement is decently organized into five scrolls each broken into further sections. In turn, the scrolls are entitled Atmosphere, Secrets, People, The Six Realms, and Scenarios and Sinister Seeds. This is followed by four appendices.

After the book's opening fiction, Atmosphere gets down to what you need to know about Japan -- language, geography, cultural differences, what weapons are legal, and so on. There are new occupations for both Japanese and foreign investigators. The former range from the modern such as the Bosozoku (young motorcycle gang members), corporate salaryman, and radical ultra nationalist, to the more traditional Buddhist priest, hereditary ykai (monster) hunter, and itako, blind female Shinto shaman who possess second sight and can channel spirits. The latter covers common foreigner occupations such as bartender/hostess, English teacher, and corporate transplant. New skills likewise take in the old and new, also covering the martial arts and suggesting how both sumo and ninja characters can be played. Some skills are magical, Channel Spirit obviously (though it can go disastrously wrong if the skill roll is fumbled and the wrong entity is channeled), while Meditation is one that every investigator will want as it helps reduce Sanity loss. Even Oriental Medicine can be helpful in restoring Sanity through the realignment of a person's *ki*.

Also discussed is handling the mentality of both Japanese and foreign investigators. For foreigners this is "Culture Shock," reflected in greater Sanity loss due to Japan's strangeness. For the Japanese, this includes group mentality (which can reduce the effect of Sanity loss), common mental illnesses and phobias, and actual attitudes to mental illness.

So far, so mundane, but *Secrets of Japan* really gets into the dark swing of things with the Mythos subversion of Japanese religions in the Secrets scroll. In turn, Buddhism, Shinto, and Taoism are twisted in a shocking and potentially offensive manner, although each twist is in keeping with the uncaring nature of the Mythos' cosmic horror. Thus in degenerate Buddhism, worshippers can achieve nirvana and an understanding of the cosmos through spiritual union with Azathoth! In dark Taosim, Taoist alchemists can petition the Jade Emperor for immortality, with the rejected turned into living statues of jade. Shinto is more subtly twisted, hiding secrets that link the Imperial family in particular, and all Japanese back to ancient Mu, and even a series of gates that lead elsewhere and can let things in. Items important to each of the faiths are described, along with listings of Mythos tomes, artifacts, and spells. Two of the more interesting tomes include a Mythos version of Lafcadio Hearn's *Supernaturalia Japonica,* and a further treatise by revered samurai swordsman, Musashi Miyamoto, that can be studied to enhance the sword skill to supernatural levels.

The People scroll starts at the top and works down, from the Imperial family and government though military, police, the corporate keiritsu, and education to the Yakuza. Behind them are a raft of secret societies and organizations. Buddha's Tears recruits initiates through video games and anime, drawing on their life energy to secret ends; the Brotherhood of the Black Lotus works to continue the efforts begun in ancient Mu to open Gates to the Six Realms and summon Mappo NO Ryjin, the Great Old One who haunts the Japanese consciousness as the Great Dragon; while the Dragon Lords are ultra nationalist yakuza who work to place Serpent man hybrids in positions of power. Project Yrei is a corporate backed research program that combines the Mythos and science, one result being an anime inspired suit of bio-morph armor complete with tentacles and self-healing.

The fourth scroll, The Six Realms, takes Buddhism's six realms of existence and -- like the second scroll -- gives them a dark twist. It reinterprets Japanese myth across the six, now seen as various dimensions that are akin to the Dreamlands. The six are the Realms of Heavenly Beings, Humans, Animal Kingdom, Asuras (evil spirits), Hungry Spirits (ghosts), and the Hells. Essentially this is a bestiary that takes in traditional Japanese creatures like Kitsune and Oni, but adds just a few direct Mythos entities, mostly avatars of the Great Old Ones. The traditional creatures would still provide effective threats and encounters though a Keeper will need to avoid monster-of-the-week syndrome.

Barely mentioned are the Dreamlands commonly visited by the Japanese. These are "Old Edo," a dream of Medieval Japan, and for those wanting giant robots and the hi-tech, there is Mega-Tokyo and Colony Five. The reader will have to wait for future supplements detailing the Japanese Dreamlands, although the Keeper might be something together from the details given here.

The scenarios begin well with "The Hin-no-Maru Slayings," a murder mystery with political and supernatural rather than Mythos elements intended for beginning foreign or Japanese characters. "Meiro (The Labyrinth)" is less effective, drawing the investigators in with a madness inducing anime collectible card produced by an obscure corporation headquartered in a weird dungeon-style/James Bond villain's base. Running the headquarters scene is at best awkward, and this is an unsubtle piece that exposes the characters to the Mythos too early. Finally, "The Yonagumi Monuments" adapts the supplement's opening fiction to send the investigators diving on undersea ruins off the coast of Okinawa. Playable enough, it feels sort of desperate given the number of ideas within the book that could have been developed in its place. Many of these appear in the several Sinister Seeds that follow. Finally there is a discussion of historical scenarios which only serves to show that the subject deserves a book of its own.

The four appendices add a cultural lexicon, the traditional timelines both mundane and outré, a short gazetteer of the Mythos across Asia country by country, and a look at Tokyo University and some of the Mythos tomes and artifacts in its collection. Certainly the latter could be the focal point for a campaign similar to the recently released *__Miskatonic University__* sourcebook, and be a good way to introduce Western characters as scholars. However, the gazetteer begs for expansion -- a "Secrets of India" supplement could be fascinating.

Two elements do jar, however. The Hello Kthulhu fad of one Sinister Seed is the first, while the occasional appearance of Gazira to smash cities and breathe radioactive fire is the second and worst. The inclusion of a Godzilla-like creature might be culturally appropriate, but it feels like one inclusion too many.

Fundamentally, ***Secrets of Japan: A Guide To Roleplaying In Present Day Japan*** is an absorbing read and is quite literally stuffed to the gills with information. Yet it feels as if the author has tried to get too much into the book and twist too much of the Mythos into the setting. Trim some of it, and there might have been room to develop the scenarios a little more, or give more advice on writing and running Cthulhu Japan games. It is also difficult to see who the supplement is quite for. Running the game for occidental investigators would be a real challenge given the cultural differences and difficulties, and perhaps rather than taking them to Japan, it might be easier to have them encounter the Mythos Japanese style exported amongst the Japanese living elsewhere. Running an all-Japanese game would likewise be challenging, and to do that, ***Secrets of Japan*** really needs the support promised in the "Cthulhu Japan" line plus a good campaign. Too over done in places, ***Secrets of Japan: A Guide To Roleplaying In Present Day Japan*** is nevertheless rich in both ideas and possibilities. If only Chaosium can give it the support it deserves.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Buccaneer

Published by [Queen Games](#)

Designed by Stefan Dorra

Art by Jo Hartwig

full-color boxed game with 25 disks in five colors with stickers, 15 ship cards, 24 booty counters, 75 coins, rules; $24.95

Avast and all that. Time for yet another stab at taking the romance of the pirate and putting it into board-game form. This outing, however, doesn't so much seek adventure on the high seas . . . these cutthroats haunt the coasts in the literal sense. They wait for the ships to float into the harbor laden with treasure, where they can be picked clean. Such is the life of a lazy *Buccaneer.*

The object of the game is to have the greatest booty by the time you've robbed the last ship.

Everyone (from three to five sailors can play) receives five disks in his color, with an identical assortment of pirate stickers attached to them. Four of these men have a number, from two to five, while the fifth has only a question mark. You get a starting pile of cash to seed your rotten ambitions, and the first three ships in the harbor are revealed.

On your turn, you have a choice: capture another pirate or move in to take a ship. Each ship has a disk requirement, so to attack that vessel you need to meet that minimum with the brigands in one of your stacks. If you're not ready for a boarding party, capturing pirate disks lets you start or improve stacks of buccaneers. Place one of your pirates over an opponent's piece, then place both in front of you. You're in charge of that crew for the moment. Taking lower-numbered thugs means paying them less treasure. Although six pirates is enough to take any ship, you can have up to nine in a stack. If anyone has three of their color in a stack they can mutiny, forcing the captain (the guy atop the pile) to go after the ship of their choice.

Bigger ships are worth more ducats (that's the money they use, fer you land-lubbers), and have more treasure in their holds to boot. If you move onto the vessel, you get all their cargo. The money goes to the captain, but he has to pay everyone. Each pirate is paid what his disk is worth, so hopefully you managed to impress a gang of two-ducat losers (for extra spin, each ship has a question mark value, and that's what those pirates marked "?" earn). The higher the numbers on your gang, the more you pay out . . . and if you run out of treasure stolen from the ship, you have to continue shelling out from your own coffers. Too many high-level people, and taking that ship costs you money. You cannot look at a disk stack once it's started, so mentally tracking the crew numbers can be critical.

Even if the booty is exhausted in payments, the captain of that venture still gets first pick of the treasure, represented by pictures of a barrel, candelabra, chest, and sword. If there's a second treasure pictured, the second disk down (your "first mate") gets the other prize. You get a counter for each treasure, and whoever has the most of a particular piece gets the money for that item during endgame scoring. For example, the chest is worth 15 ducats if you have more of that token than anyone else; if two people tie for number of chests, it's worth seven each; three people get five each; and so on.

Once everyone has been paid, the lost ship in the harbor is replaced (you'd think after a while someone would get wise and park somewhere else). The stack used to rob the last one disbands back to the various disk owners, to be used anew, and play resumes. When all the ships have been picked clean the game ends, and the highest money total wins.

The pieces are nice, typical of what you'd find in your European games. The coins are punch-outs, not plastic, so you save some money there. But you still have wooden playing pieces, colorful stickers with good illustrations, and lovely ship cards, so if there's buyer's regret it won't come from the components. The game itself, on the other hand . . .

Buccaneer plays well enough, though it feels like it's been declawed. There are no mechanics for the piracy proper -- the focus on money makes it more of an economic effort -- and you're taking out ships sitting on the water 100 yards away. It's hard to feel like a pirate when you don't actually get to run up the Jolly Roger. The rules are simple, as is the presentation, but this is part of what prevents it from being a completely satisfying simulation. Mind you, the game is solid and works (it's much the same material seen in ***Die Safeknacker***), and the combination of memory and risk assessment do make for a serviceable competition. As long as you don't mind that a little of the background wind has been taken out of its sails, it may be worth lying in wait for. If you're looking for the pure pirate experience, you've got other game options that don't require you to overlook the lack of genre trappings.

--Andy Vetromile

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

Kunruk Above/Kunruk Below

Matt Riggsby

Kunruk is a ritual center, the object of pilgrimages and grand ceremonies. Temples and sacred enclosures dominate its skyline. A constant stream of pilgrims makes its way to Kunruk to bathe in the holy waters and be transported in religious visions.

Kunruk is a center of industry. Rich deposits of ore are close at hand, and volcanic vents provide the heat necessary to turn it into fine metals. The metalwork of Kunruk is known far and wide.

Kunruk is two cities. Kunruk Above, the center of worship, sits under the baking sun, open to visitors from all directions. Kunruk Below, the center of industry, is a settlement of dwarves, mining and manufacturing in natural caves and tunnels dug through softer stones deep underground. They coexist, with the surface-dwellers wary of what the dwarves might be doing underground and the dwarves skittish about the volume of human traffic so close above their heads. But many feel that the coexistence is a fragile thing, and is little more than a technological development or religious movement away from being shattered.

Geography and Land Use

Kunruk is situated in a patch of jagged hills between areas of rolling grassland in the west and desert in the east. In a few places, deep wells provide irrigation which turns prairie into good farmland, but for the most part, the land is better for herding and supports a great many goats and sheep. A significant amount of water now makes its way to the city through a network of small canals and, closer to the town itself, raised aqueducts and tunnels for water, so farming is declining while herding is on the increase.

The site of the town itself is set on several low, rounded hills which are higher, sharp-ridged ones, with gaps providing natural approaches from several different directions. This puts Kunruk in a poor defensive position (attackers could easily bombard the city from surrounding hilltops), but it provides a bit of an advantage for bringing in water.

Kunruk's geology is jumbled and chaotic, with a complex of volcanic pipes surrounded by limestones and surprising patches of granite and other metamorphic rocks. Water activity has cut through a great deal of limestone, leaving caves and underground reservoirs. A low level of volcanic activity has continued, sufficient to heat some of the water to high temperatures and bring lava close to (but not up to) the surface. The region is given to frequent minor earthquakes, although serious ones are very few and very far between.

Kunruk Above has a population of about 10,000 permanent residents, with at least 5,000 visitors at any given time, rising as high as 15,000 during particularly favorable months. Most are pilgrims, but some are "seasonal" residents who support the pilgrim trade. The region around it is dotted with small villages. Kunruk Below is significantly smaller, with a population of about 4,000 dwarves, all of whom live in and around a single grand cavern.

History

A small oracular temple could be found at Kunruk at least as far back as seven centuries ago. Religious pilgrims took advantage of gases arising from fissures in the ground to have ecstatic visions. The site is also relatively rich in water, with a number of pools on the surface, so it served as a landmark for some cross-desert trade, though most trans-desert travel used easier routes well to the north and south. A small town, hardly more than a village with facilities for travelers, supported the temple and caravanserai.

Kunruk became more prominent three centuries ago, after the ruler of a nearby kingdom passed by the temple, dedicated to the goddess Syvella, and sought guidance on his choice of marriage partners. The wife he chose based on

that experience quickly bore him several sons, and with each one the king endowed a new shrine at Kunruk, which together came to be known as the Four Brothers. The royal attention soon attracted other visitors to the shrines. Once an obscure backwater and stop along the way, Kunruk became a destination in its own right.

As Kunruk's fame grew, so did the number of visiting pilgrims and the facilities to accommodate them. Inns were constructed, the existing temples grew into large temple complexes, new shrines sprang up around the fringes of the town, and programs of spiritual exercises developed to meet the needs of the pilgrims. Tiled tanks were constructed to hold water from the sacred springs, and enclosures were built so that pilgrims could breathe their fill of sacred, hallucinogenic vapors in an orderly setting.

The town also evolved something like a government. The leaders of the various temples formed a council for regulating visitors, negotiating for food imports, and so on. Since other enterprises in Kunruk depended on the temples, the operators of inns, food stalls, and so on accepted their authority.

The next significant events in the history of Kunruk took place about two hundred miles to the northeast, where a mountain range cuts through the desert. About two hundred years ago, a dynastic conflict in the large dwarven community there stopped just short of civil war. A large faction accepted exile and set out to find a new home.

They traveled through miles of previously unexplored caverns, scouting for favorable conditions. After a long journey (famously lasting two years and three days), they came upon a suitable place and their High Chief (so the leading dwarf was called) declared that they had found their new home. Large caverns would provide suitable space for growing nutritious mushrooms and building new homes. A fast-running underground river turned out to be a distant tributary to a network of subterranean waterways which could connect them to other dwarven settlements. Iron ore was plentiful, and there were scattered but rich veins of copper, lead, and other metals. Volcanic vents provided them with useful sources of heat to supplement standard furnaces. No orcs or other monsters were evidently at hand. It might not support a dwarven metropolis, but it was more than enough for a good-sized town.

It came as quite a surprise to everyone involved, then, when a team of dwarven workers digging a ventilation shaft emerged in the middle of a temple. The confused reaction which followed, with hallucinating pilgrims describing monsters rising out of the ground and dwarven miners who hadn't been on the surface in years describing a palace full of madmen, did not get the relationship off to a good start. Although hostilities might have broken out, cooler heads eventually prevailed but the tension didn't entirely go away.

Both sides had anxieties about the other. The surface-dwellers were horrified at the possibility of the dwarves diverting the hot springs and volcanic vents and cutting off what they saw as sacred emanations of the earth. The dwarves, already insecure about the poor economic footing of their new settlement (at this point, they had constructed at best makeshift homes and had only the beginnings of an agricultural system), feared that they could be overwhelmed by a horde of well-supplied religious fanatics.

Both fears were at least a little justified. The first 50 years or so saw a series of crises as vents and hot springs were, in fact, interrupted. The complex geology of Kunruk Below, as it was coming to be called, made it difficult to predict how the dwarves' underground work would affect the surface (and, some believe, they didn't put in much effort to find out anyway). There were inevitable retaliations, with attacks on dwarves resulting in deaths on both sides.

It was commerce which eventually calmed things down. Though the tension between the dwarves and the temples continued at a low level, the merchants made many new friends. As they do everywhere, the dwarves produced high-quality manufactured goods, and they needed a market. The above-ground merchants quickly found that the dwarves had a taste for mutton and a need for wood and charcoal, which they could produce faster and cheaper than the dwarves. Merchants who made Kunruk a regular stop on their routes grew increasingly wealthy as they solidified their relationship with the dwarves.

Of course, this has led to other conflicts. Over the past century, the merchants have become wealthy and powerful enough to challenge the authority of the temples in some ways. The merchants are still dependent on the temples to provide them with customers, but the temples rely on the merchants to supply the pilgrims who enrich them both, and the merchants have a small but significant income from trading in dwarf-made goods. Underground, the dwarves are

facing their own problems. Despite being a conservative group among a conservative people, the need for extensive trade has caused cracks in their old social order.

Politics and Government

Kunruk Above is an unabashed theocracy. Traditionally, the greatest power in Kunruk Above is the alliance of the five largest, oldest temples, whose policies are determined by a body called the Synod. The Four Brothers each send a single representative, while the temple of Syvella sends two. Decisions of the Synod require no more than one dissenting vote, essentially giving the temple of Syvella veto power.

The Synod acts as both a government and a sort of corporation, organizing food and water supplies for the major temples and their extensive facilities for visitors. Priests are all empowered to oversee legal proceedings and mediate disputes, although the Synod will claim jurisdiction over particularly sensitive issues and sometimes acts as a court of appeal.

As the major economic power in its area, and without significant neighbors, Kunruk's authority extends as far as the Synod can project force, a radius of perhaps thirty miles. There are no formal borders (Kunruk's authority slowly gives way to traditional tribal authorities), but Kunruk will take a dim view of blatant criminality close enough to the city to cause problems with the pilgrim routes.

The increasingly powerful merchant class has yet to directly challenge the power of the temples. However, the trade in dwarven goods makes them less beholden to the temples for contracts and other approvals, so they've been driving increasingly hard bargains. Rumor has it that some have used their new wealth to influence priests whose opinions and morals seem sufficiently flexible. It seems unlikely that a merchant or association of merchants would make a direct play for power, but one never knows.

Kunruk Below's government is based on dwarven forms which are still being adapted to a relatively small population. The position of High Chief theoretically open to the head of any family upon acclamation by the people and examination by a council of elder craftsmen. In practice, the position has proved hereditary, with the five High Chiefs of Kunruk Below over the past centuries being one another's sons or brothers. The High Chief has a wide range of unquestioned judicial and executive powers, but new laws, particularly new taxes, must be approved by the council of craftsmen.

Although the succession of High Chiefs has never been seriously contested, a class war is simmering over membership on the council of craftsmen. The craftsmen are heads of extended households, chosen for a combination of seniority, wisdom, and demonstrated ability in their crafts. Usually, the available pool of senior craftsmen is a tiny fraction of the population. In traditional settlements, households are very large, and many families spend more time digging tunnels, mining ore, or growing the mushrooms which form the bulk of the dwarven diet. However, the conflict which formed this faction split any number of families, resulting in a large number of small households. Perhaps more importantly, the extensive existing cave networks and close economic ties to Kunruk Above mean that poorer households, which might otherwise have to concentrate on lower-class trades, can work on metalcraft themselves. The result has been that, just as in Kunruk Above, a growing middle class is threatening the power of the traditional aristocracy.

Armed Forces and Law Enforcement

Although it has no regular armies (Kunruk lacks both territorial ambitions and nearby enemies), Kunruk Above maintains a small force of guards to protect the considerable riches of the temples. Most are mercenaries, but mercenaries paid well enough to ensure their loyalty. The Synod usually leaves the guarding to the guards, not bothering with petty operational details, but command is ultimately in "civilian" hands. The Synod has foresightedly hired guards as individuals or small groups and changes assignments frequently, to help prevent other loyalties from arising. Likewise, there is no overall military commander who might gain the loyalty of all the troops. Instead, several officers in charge of various day-to-day operations answer to the Synod. It would be a poor arrangement in wartime, but it seems to work well enough for the simple security work the guards do. Priests act as a judiciary, with the Synod

acting as a court of appeal.

The guards are occasionally called on to help priests enforce the law outside of the temples proper and in the hinterland (for example, to collect taxes from an uncooperative family compound), but merchants employ guards of their own to help keep order in the markets and inns. Privately employed guards work for individual merchant houses, but by the laws of the city may be called on to help keep order in case of general disturbances. There are about 700 professional fighting men in the city, evenly split between temple and private guards. There is no regularity in equipment or fighting style, but most are veteran warriors.

Kunruk Below has slightly more formal security arrangements. Every family is required to send an adult male, traditionally the youngest adult, to regular (every ten days) drills with weapons and armor. If required to send out forces, Kunruk Below could field a reasonably skilled if mostly green troop of around 400 heavy infantry. If directly attacked, all able-bodied adult males would be called on to fight as well, bringing the number up to something like 1500. Since the older men have spent their time in the militia, they'd be relatively skilled fighters as well.

Although the militia could theoretically be called on to quell disturbances, the need has never arisen in Kunruk Below. Instead, law enforcement is carried out by a group of censors, magistrates answering to the High Chief. The censors investigate wrong-doing and political orthodoxy, as well as inspect craft work before it goes to market. Nobody likes the censors (they're very nosy, which is doubly annoying in clannish dwarven society), but they carry a great deal of responsibility to ensure that standards established by the council of craftsmen are upheld.

Industry and Commerce

Kunruk Above's largest industry by far is religious tourism. Most inhabitants of the town make a living working in hostelries and drinking shops, selling provisions, acting as guides, making amulets and other religious souvenirs, and so on. The temples regulate much of this traffic, though they only directly control a portion of it. There are also more than the usual number of scribes and artisans involved in building trades. Many pilgrims come in search of divine healing, so in addition to oracular and general religious services, the temples provide a great deal of health care. The pilgrims engage in more or less complex regimens of prayer, ceremony, diet, and rest or exercise. A large minority of priests have some skill in medicine.

The temples also bring in a great deal of food both from the surrounding region and abroad. The nearest navigable stream (and that only by barges with very shallow drafts) comes within eleven miles of Kunruk. A small town, casually called "Kunruk Port," has grown up at that point to the stream for the convenience of both travelers and shippers, and on the last leg of its journey most commerce travels along a road between Kunruk and the transshipment point.

Kunruk Below produces fine metalwork: weapons, armor, tools, jewelry, and so on. The bulk of their work is in iron, which is particularly common in the most accessible tunnels, and they are best known for producing fine armor and small quantities of remarkable stonework. A family of dwarves has done a notably good job decorating the faades of several buildings at one of the Four Brothers, and there is a growing demand for their work both in the city and from wealthy visitors. Their jewelry is only middling quality by dwarven standards, but excellent for any other race. Most valuable metals must be imported, since there's currently not enough native supply to meet demand. Kunruk Below also imports significant amounts of wood and charcoal and most of its food.

This last has been a point of contention among the dwarves. Although the council of craftsmen has traditionally favored the contact, since it enriches them with a high volume of trade, the High Chiefs have regarded it as a strategic weakness, and a vocal minority of the lower classes is notably xenophobic. A majority of dwarves is torn on the issue, uneasy about dependency on outsiders, but unwilling to return to the low-status jobs they'd have to perform in order to become self-sufficient.

Religion

For a town built around religion, Kunruk Above is surprisingly nondenominational. The reason for this is that the spot

it occupies has typically been surrounded by regions following different but all theologically permissive faiths. That is, the societies most likely to send people to Kunruk (and to build temples there) may have their preferred gods, but none of them hold that those are the only gods. Consequently, one can find temples and shrines dedicated to an earth goddess native to Kunruk, a harvest god from a region to the southwest, a trio of faceless principles of nature (fire, wind, and water) from the east, and so on.

This is not to say that there is no competition between religions. Each temple quietly promotes the virtues of its own deities, listing miracles which have been performed and souls enlightened. However, the competition is carried out in the form of advertising, not violent sectarian conflict. Moreover, it's the smaller, less influential temples and shrines which shill for visitors. The members of the Synod are more restrained in their self-publicizing, relying more on reputation and control of public affairs.

The dwarves, for the most part, keep themselves apart from aboveground religious issues. They're willing to accept that the gods worshiped in Kunruk Above exist, but maintain that those gods are not the gods for dwarves. Instead, they venerate their ancestors, believing that they are far more interested in the welfare of their descendents than any distant deity would be.

Food

The native cuisine around Kunruk is fairly dull, consisting largely of flatbread, several onion-like vegetables (frequently simmered to enhance their mild sweetness), various beans cooked and mashed to a paste, and small quantities of mutton, often spiced, cured, and used in small shavings as a flavoring rather than a substantial ingredient on its own. The region produces a moderate quantity of wine, which is a staple of the local diet, usually watered down.

Nevertheless, the fame of the temples and the heavy traffic in pilgrims has introduced a great many new ingredients and cuisines. A quick pass through the markets of Kunruk Above can turn up a variety of other meats and meat animals, vegetables, whole grains and flours from a variety of cereals, even fish (smoked, salted, or dried, of course). Enough pilgrims come from nearby nations that several inns cater to their tastes, so its easy to find food to suit just about anyone's tastes.

For the dwarves of Kunruk Below, staple foodstuffs are varieties of fungus which need only rock to grow, taking the place of grains in human societies. However, the tunnels of Kunruk Below don't support as many strains of fungus and their byproducts as the tunnels from which the dwarves came, so the traditional dwarvish diet is restricted to a monotonous few crops. The basic foods in Kunruk Above and Below are therefore quite similar, but are prepared in traditional dwarven styles Below, with large cuts of meat more common than seasoned mutton shavings and most foods roasted or fried rather than boiled, and the dwarves prefer ale they make themselves to the local wine.

Society and Culture

Kunruk used to have a social character defined by tight-knit family groups living independently of one another in large compounds, herding animals or growing grain, fighting the occasional feud eventually settled by marriages and payments, and making donations to temples in return for mediation of otherwise intractable disputes. Because of the growth of the temples and the rapid transformation of Kunruk into an important pilgrimage site, much of that has eroded. Traditional family compounds in the hinterland still supply the city, but the extended family in Kunruk is under heavy attack. Eager younger family members frequently strike out on their own to make personal fortunes as tour guides, hostellers, and the like. Some families have survived by creating networks of businesses: a guide directs travelers to his uncle's inn, who recommends buying provisions from his brother, and so on.

Since literacy is relatively high as a result of religious education, Kunruk Above has developed the rudiments of popular literature. Pamphlets, usually four to 16 pages, are rented for a pittance (plus refundable deposit) from "word-shops," small booths where the proprietor keeps a chest of chapbooks and a ledger of rentals. Visitors read selections of useful prayers and healthful regimens, while natives go more for favorite folk tales and stories of adventure.

Despite increasing class struggle, the dwarves have maintained one core value: pride in workmanship. Craft skill is still the sign of a suitable candidate for marriage, political office, and general wisdom. They have nothing in the way of performing arts and this particular community has retained only a few of the classics of dwarven literature, but there is constant silent competition in the form of craft. Relief frescoes on houses, elaborately crafted lanterns, ornate buckles, and so on are always noted and the appearance of one's house and ornaments are always subtly judged by other dwarves.

Things To See and Do

Since it's a pilgrimage site, Kunruk Above is as welcoming to visitors as a low-tech city can be. There are plenty of places to find a meal fitting just about any dietary requirements, a place to bed down for the night to fit any budget, entertainments and conversation in many languages, and merchants who won't bat an eye at foreign currency. Here are some specific points of interest:

The Synod temples: The temple to Syvella and the Four Brothers have similar designs. Each has a triangular plaza in front, with gates into a walled compound at the apex and elaborate reliefs and statues along the two sides leading up to it (the side of the triangle opposite the apex is open to the streets). Through the gates is a broad, paved walkway flanked by gardens and small shrines, leading to the temple proper. The temple and central avenue are surrounded by special-purpose shrines, lodging for priests and important (or high-paying) pilgrims, offices, buildings for baths and taking vapors, treasuries and storerooms, and gardens. The temple complexes are open to all during daylight hours, but some parts (treasuries and private offices, for example) are closed to the general public, and only clergy and selected pilgrims may stay overnight.

Sacred baths: Several hot springs under Kunruk have been harnessed for neatly tiled and decorated nympharia in the temples. The baths are famous for healing powers, and visitors to the temples frequently wash or soak in the waters during their visits.

Holy vapors: The original attraction of Kunruk was underground chambers where one could breathe vapors coming from the ground and receive sacred visions. Each of the temples of the Synod has several cells where pilgrims may, for sufficient donations, have their own mystic visions.

Gateway Circus: The way from Kunruk Above to Kunruk Below is at the southern outskirts, of the city, Gateway Circus. The Circus is a circular pit about 25 feet deep and over 100 feet across. A 15-foot-wide spiral ramp makes a grand curve almost entirely around the pit, and the center is generally the place to buy from or sell to the dwarves.

Kunruk Below is less well adapted to visitors, and the dwarves themselves aren't terribly happy to see strangers. Technically, humans are only allowed to visit the central market in Kunruk Below freely. Special permission is required to enter the deeper tunnels.

Residential cavern: The tunnel from the Gateway Circus continues in a broad spiral down another 40 feet or so, through fortified gateways to an opening 20 feet above the floor of a large, domed cavern, with a ramp leading down to a plaza the size of the Gateway Circus. This cavern, a vaguely oval blob about 150 by 200 yards with a ceiling up to 50 feet above floor level, houses most of the dwarven settlement. Though this would be fairly small for a human settlement, the dwarves have made the most of the space. The cavern is filled with tightly packed stone houses three or four stories tall lit by bioluminescent fungi or magically glowing crystals, with semi-public workshop spaces on the ground floor and residential spaces higher up. A few extended families, distributed between houses, have built covered walkways over the streets or access tunnels under them, allowing them to move from one house to another without going "outside." Outsiders don't formally need permission to come here, but they'll be questioned and watched closely, and they can't enter any other tunnels without permission and an escort.

Ore tunnels: Several large tunnels lead out from the residential cavern and quickly branch and twist, following veins of various ores. The dwarves have an elaborate set of symbols indicating where the tunnels lead, but someone not intimately familiar with dwarven mining practices will quickly become lost. Though most of the population lives in the residential cavern, a few small families, stand-offish even by dwarven standards, have established homes in disused

areas of the ore tunnels.

Vent shafts: All of the tunnels are punctuated here and there by ventilation shafts leading to the surface. They're often concealed, but since most are excavated by hand (except for those taking advantage of natural fissures in the rock), they're usually large enough for someone to squeeze through. Small smithies are set up in a number of locations in the ore tunnels immediately beneath ventilation shafts.

Foundry: In addition to the ore tunnels, there's one other major branch off of the residential cavern. It heads north and sharply downwards, leading to what's usually called the foundry. In an extremely hot cavern, the dwarves take advantage of roiling pools of lava to raise the temperature of furnaces or simply increase air flow through them. This volcanic resource allows them to reach high temperatures more quickly and cheaply than the norm and is a point of pride among the dwarves of Kunruk Below. Unfortunately for outsiders, the design of the furnaces is a dwarven craft secret, so no one other than the natives is allowed in.

Kunruk in the Campaign

Kunruk is, first and foremost, a destination. It's a good place to go for decent equipment (particularly for characters who are otherwise in the middle of nowhere), provisions, trade opportunities, and mystical advice. If they're not going there for reasons of their own, PCs could easily be hired as guards for a caravan of merchants or pilgrims. Kunruk is also an excellent venue for diplomacy and, therefore, intrigue. Adventures could include negotiations between the Synod and the High Chief, mercantile wrangling, class, occupational, and generational conflict among the city's factions, and diplomats from nearby nations meeting on Kunruk Above's neutral and sacred ground.

Kunruk might also serve as a base of operations, although that's perhaps not the best use. It's a long way from anything else interesting, and hardly anyone in Kunruk is *from* Kunruk, so while it's a nice place to visit, not nearly as many people actually live there. Still, PCs could be agents of the Synod, merchant importers resident in Kunruk, or among the few dwarves who go much beyond the Gateway Circus. Here are some other ideas for adventures involving Kunruk:

Holy Cleansing: An oracle has spoken, and Kunruk must be cleansed of the impure. That means the dwarves. This causes a considerable ruckus in Kunruk Above, where the population is divided on the authenticity of the oracle. It causes an even greater ruckus in Kunruk Below, where the dwarves have blocked the tunnel from the Gateway Circus. If this turns into actual fighting, it will likely become an ugly guerilla conflict, with outnumbered dwarves trying to fend off less skilled but far more plentiful humans invading their dark, narrow tunnels.

Missionary Man: For all the decades they've lived there, the dwarves have appeared immune to the fumes which seep through the rocks and cause ecstatic visions in humans. That's about to change. A few dwarves, working in obscure corners of the Foundry or the northern ore tunnels, start to have visions themselves. They now claim that the ancestors and distant gods of the earth are providing them with guidance. They'll almost certainly be at odds with their elders, and definitely with the Synod. As if the old factions aren't complicated enough, a new line of revelation will cause them to split into more factions, both above and below.

"Historically Taunton is a part of Minehead already": In the centuries since the dwarves of Kunruk Below settled in their caverns, things have changed in their homeland. An expansionist faction has taken control, they've tracked down their exiled faction, and they want to take control. The dwarves of Kunruk Below are looking at a likely invasion, and the people of Kunruk Above are looking at, at best, a violent conflict beneath their feet. Will they aid their stand-offish neighbors? Will they have a choice?

Mudslide!

for the *d20 System*

by Michael Tresca

Combat on mountains is an all too common occurrence. Add in the preponderance of fire-spells and transmute rock to mud and you have a recipe for disaster. Enter a nature's murky villain, the mudslide, also known as a lahar. Not quite mud, not quite rock, lahars are a deadly combination of water and earth, with the worst traits of both.

Starting a Lahar

In nature, lahars are normally generated in one of two ways: as a reaction to extreme heat, such as a volcanic eruption, or as a result of a large quantity of water striking a mountain's icecap. In all cases, frozen ice in elevated climes is a necessary component to start a lahar.

Terrain Type	Likelihood of Lahar
Cliff	15%
Steep Slope	10%
Gradual Slope	5%

There are also modifiers for the climate of the terrain. Cold climates are more likely to start a lahar because there's more frozen water than warmer climates.

Climate Type	Likelihood of Lahar
Warm	-5%
Cold	+5%

And then there's the weather. Heavy downpours can cause lahars.

Weather Type	Likelihood of Lahar
Hurricane	+5%
Thunderstorm	+4%
Precipitation	+3%
Heat Wave	+2%

Spells used in the vicinity of Cliff, Steep Slope, or Gradual Slope terrains can trigger a lahar. Certain spells that have the fire descriptor have an additional 2% chance per spell level of the spell to trigger a lahar, including *burning hands, delayed blast fireball, fire seeds, fire storm, fire trap, fireball, flame arrow, flame strike, flaming sphere, incendiary cloud, meteor swarm, produce flame, scorching ray,* and *wall of fire*. Spells that have the earth descriptor have a 1% chance per spell level of the spell to trigger a lahar, including earthquake, move earth, repel metal or stone, soften earth and stone, stone shape, and transmute rock to mud. Note that earthquakes always trigger avalanches, but not necessarily a lahar. Control weather can also cause a lahar depending on the weather (see Weather Modifiers, above).

In an area where a lahar is possible, these effects can be cumulative. For example, if a wizard casts fireball (+6%) and then transmute rock to mud (+5%) in a cold (+5%), mountainous area with a steep slope (+10%), the likelihood of triggering a lahar is 21%.

Burrowing creatures that have a fire attack like the thoqqua or remorhaz have an additional chance of triggering a lahar equal to the damage it inflicts. Red dragons are fond of breathing on cliff faces to cause such lahars.

Once a lahar erupts, it slides downwards at a speed proportional to how steep the slope of the mountain is.

Mountain Terrain	Lahar Speed
Cliff	500 feet/round
Steep Slope	350 feet/round
Gradual Slope	250 feet/round

Outrunning a lahar isn't the smartest thing to do, but some creatures might not have any other choice.

Dangers of Lahars

Impact

The typical lahar has a width of 1d6×100 feet, from one edge of the slide zone to the opposite edge. The bury zone in the center of the lahar is half as wide as the avalanche's full width. To determine the precise location of characters in the path of a lahar, roll 1d6×20; the result is the number of feet from the center of the path taken by the bury zone to the center of the party's location.

A lahar consists of two distinct areas: the bury zone (in the direct path of the falling mud and ice) and the slide zone (the area the mud spreads out to encompass). Characters in the bury zone always take damage from the lahar; characters in the slide zone may be able to get out of the way. Characters in the bury zone take 8d6 points of damage, or half that amount if they make a DC 15 Reflex save. If the character makes his save, he stays afloat (see below). Failing the save means he is buried and continues to take damage every round until the lahar stops.

Characters in the slide zone take 3d6 points of damage, or no damage if they make a DC 15 Reflex save. If the character makes his save he avoids the lahar entirely. Failure means he is swept up in the lahar and continues to take damage every round until the lahar stops.

Staying Afloat

Characters who survive the impact of a moving lahar must make a DC 20 Swim check every round to simply stay above the surface, or a DC 30 Swim check to move 5 feet in whatever direction is desired. If a trapped character fails this check by 5 or more, he sinks below the surface and is considered buried. Success means the character continues to take 8d6 points of damage per round but can still breathe.

Buried

Once a lahar comes to a stop, it has the consistency of solid concrete; all buried characters are considered pinned. Each buried characters takes an additional 1d6 points of nonlethal damage per minute while pinned. If a pinned character falls unconscious, he or she must make a DC 15 Constitution check or take 1d6 points of lethal damage each minute thereafter until freed or dead. Creatures can be buried 1d100 feet beneath the surface of a lahar.

Prevention

Spotting a Lahar

Characters can make a DC 20 Survival or Knowledge (nature or geography) check to recognize signs of a lahar. A lahar can be spotted from as far away as 1d10×500 feet downslope by a character who makes a DC 20 Spot check, treating the lahar as a Colossal creature. If all characters fail their Spot checks to determine the encounter distance, the lahar moves closer to them, and they automatically become aware of it when it closes to half the original distance. It's possible to hear a lahar coming even if you can't see it. Under optimum conditions (no other loud noises occurring), a character that makes a DC 15 Listen check can hear the lahar when it is 1d6×500 feet away. This check might have a

DC of 20, 25, or higher in conditions where hearing is difficult (such as in the middle of a thunderstorm).

Controlling a Lahar

Spells that can alter the path of a lahar might prevent it from doing too much damage. *Move earth, stone shape,* and *wall of stone* can all help divert the path of the lahar away from endangered creatures.

Stopping a Lahar

Stopping a lahar isn't easy. Two spells that can halt a lahar are *transmute mud to rock* and *control water,* which may well end up turning the lahar into an avalanche instead. *Transmute mud to rock* reduces a lahar's speed by two steps. Using *control water* to lower water reduces the lahar's land speed by one step. If a lahar is traveling down a cliff face, it merely becomes an avalanche instead but keeps bouncing along. If the lahar's land speed is reduced below 250 per round, it grinds to a halt. All creatures buried beneath its surface are still pinned, of course.

Lahars in Fantasy

Lahars are most often associated with flash floods, but a volcano that hasn't fully erupted can precipitate them. When a volcano erupts, lahars precede the molten lava that inevitably follows, but some volcanoes merely "burp," heating up enough to melt the ice caps without actually disgorging any lava.

Lahars tend to follow the paths of rivers, which also happens to be where many humanoid settlements make their homes. Lahars tear up trees, sweeping them along in a terrible morass of mud, ice, water, and debris. Lahars create deserts afterwards, scouring the earth clean of all features.

Creatures with the fire subtype are fond of creating lahars to destroy their enemies from a distance. The conditions must be right to cause such an attack and are not taken lightly; lahars destroy mountain homes as much as they ruin valley settlements. Fire giants rarely use these tactics, but red dragons, who can cause lahars far from their own lairs, are only too happy to start a lahar.

The creature most likely to accidentally start a lahar is the remorhaz. It has the deadly combination of living in polar conditions with the ability to rapidly heat its surroundings. More than one excited remorhaz has caused the death of thousands when battling an opponent at the top of a mountain.

For spell casters, the most efficient minion to create a lahar is the thoqqua. Thoqquas burrow into cliff faces, steaming holes behind that sometimes collapse into lahars. Alternately, spell casters just might choose to create a lahar with rock to mud or soften earth and stone.

Few creatures can actually survive a lahar, but even fewer can use it to their advantage. Two monsters of note can, should they be so inclined, easily use lahars to devastate a region and even attack characters trapped within it: xorns and earth elementals. Lahars flow around them like water, making them extremely deadly opponents. Although lahars are made of mud, aquatic and water subtype creatures are just as helpless as their land-bound cousins.

A 12-Step Master Plan for Supers Teams

by Brian Rogers

When starting a super hero game, you'd likely think the PCs will be a team of costumed heroes with super-powers. Even if they are, what sort of heroes will they be? on what kind of team? in what nature of world?

While a campaign prospectus and a discussion of the comics continuum help, here is another tool. This questionnaire makes world creation a cooperative process between the players and the GM, not unlike the multiple city creation for a league. Some GMs might skip the prospectus entirely, while others might have a tighter prospectus description to keep control of world creation or selection.

There is also a worked example, using the following prospectus entry:

> *The Odyssey:* in the early 1970s a team of explorers became more than human; in a world where
> Firestorm Effects have been seen as a threat, this group becomes the first publicly accepted super-
> heroes. This game is a teaching tool for players who have problems adjusting to super-hero tropes,
> so it will have a 4-color sensibility and public heroism. Game system: *Silver Age Sentinels.*
> Influences: *Fantastic Four, Tom Strong.* Players -- Asha, Dave, Stephen.

1) How close are your PCs? Are you a family (Fantastic Four), people who live & work together (X-Men), people who work & socialize together (Avengers), people with scheduled team meetings (Justice League) or people who only meet for emergencies (Alpha Flight)? This has a big effect on party interactions and types of adventures.

As GM I participated in the FE Explorers creation session, offering the idea of PCs as being the crew of an exploratory sub (the *Odyssey*) who socialized & worked together. The players liked the idea, but Asha preferred "live & work together" to strengthen the team bond. The others agreed, conceiving a floating research platform as their home/offices, the PCs as brilliant Cal Tech grads/business owners, and developed a 1970's counter-culture ethos. This ran against my vision of clean-cut heroes, but it did fit the time and place.

2) What is your place in the team's Gestalt Personality? Supers teams commonly have strong personalities, with each member of the team embodying one aspect of a full psyche.

The players decided Asha would be the group's passionate drive, David its creativity, and Stephen its grounding cynicism. Stephen was picturing a student whose lapsed deferments led to a tour in Vietnam, while David saw a scientist/musician ala Buckaroo Banzai. This gave me a clear idea of how the group would work: Dave being central but interested in creation for creation's sake, with Asha pushing him to change the world and Stephen reminding them of their limits.

3) What do you provide *besides* your powers? This need not be skills -- curiosity or positive outlook also contribute. Heck, you could provide Eye Candy, because a pretty face has its uses.

Asha claimed the role of Marine Biologist to go with David's physicist/musician and Stephen's ex-marine tactician & mechanic. Given his interest in tai chi and desire to be a "scientist of action," David added martial arts to his skills. Asha became the group's spokesperson and financier, via a family inheritance.

4) What is the group's agenda? A super-hero's overriding concern is Defending Humanity (heroes can't sit by while aliens conquer the world), but others are Crime Fighting (an organized "war on crime": Batman, Daredevil), Exploration (searching for wonder: Fantastic Four, Tom Strong), Adventure (trying to help people

in a general fashion: Spider Man, Starman), a group goal (the X-Men's defending mutant-kind) or just full-time humanity defending (Superman).

Given the prospectus, Exploration was a must -- as GM I wanted a game with a *Fantastic Four* feel, so I stated that up front. The players added a desire to save humanity. As part of the 1970's aquaculture idea they hope to save the world via harmony with the sea.

5) How do the heroes resolve conflicts? Classically, crime-fighters intimidate, explorers convince, and adventurers charm. In fights, explorers defuse them or trump their antagonist's powers, crime-fighters arrange for tactical superiority, and adventurers will engage in swashbuckling fisticuffs.

As explorers, the players felt the *Odyssey* crew would use scientific prowess to out-think their opponents, but if that that failed they had no problem with brawling. Rather than being diplomats, they rely on charm and sarcasm to butter up or cut down people.

6) How does the group interact with other super-heroes and the populace? You might be the world's first super heroes, its most powerful, or just another team. Normal people might lionize you, fear you, or marginally acknowledge you. The world might be full of other super-humans but not a lot of super-heroes, or everyone with powers could be part of the cape and mask set.

The prospectus set this in the Firestorm Effect world as the first true FE super-heroes (a non-negotiable point, since this is a teaching exercise). The players accepted this, but subverted it with their scruffy, counter-culture nature. They might be super-heroes but they would not be lionized, having just as many detractors as advocates.

7) Did your heroes have heroic careers before joining the team? Some teams have single-event group origins (Fantastic Four), some have similar origins with possible past careers (i.e. all X-Men are mutants), and others have unique origins and histories (the Justice League). Heroes who start solo are more versatile while team heroes are more focused; some teams have a mix of both.

This game's set up leant itself to a single event group origin for an existing team, and the players went with it. They let me create an "origin story" session -- discovery of a crashed space ship in the Mariana Trench.

8) If your heroes had (or have) a solo career, do they have allies, contacts, sidekicks, etc. only called upon when working solo? (i.e. Batman doesn't call Robin into *Justice League* business.) Does the team have shared capital to draw on? Solo assets are less useful for the team, functionally being more chrome than assets designed for team play.

I'd thought they'd start with contacts and fame, but they limited their contacts to the CalTech/West Coast science community and 15 minutes of fame from rescuing a NASA astronaut. The team does have shared resources in their company (their sub, floating base, small team of interns), and Stephen volunteered to pick up a sidekick sub driver/medic to run the sub while the PCs explored the new world of the week.

9) Does your team have an established foe? This needn't be related to their origin or all of their challenges, but it may. Lex Luthor causes most of Superman's problems; Magneto about half of the X-Men's; both of these are key adversaries in a way that the Masters of Evil are not for the Avengers. The rivalry needn't happen immediately (Dr. Doom doesn't appear in *Fantastic Four #1,* after all).

I let the players know if they decided to go this route I had something in mind. They responded "oh, why not." I therefore wrote in Donar, a eugenically bred Argentine Nazi who was involved in their origin story. The players didn't know this at the time, as they were leaving the origin to me.

10) Do the heroes have an identifying uniform or symbol? This ranges from the Fantastic Four's team uniforms, the X-Men's shifts between team uniforms to individual ones, and the Avengers and JLA being individual. This is a good point to discuss masks and the attendant secret ID issues.

The players immediately adopted the team logo (their sub profile), but Stephen deep-sixed costumes. Instead, they have advanced wetsuits that duplicate team costumes -- distinctive and form fitting -- while being functional. No secret IDs; those aren't appropriate for the close-knit explorer team.

11) If you have a group origin, is there a common theme in your powers? (The Fantastic Four functionally have elemental powers, Mutants share high endurance.) If you have divergent origins, were you recruited to fill a niche on the team? (The Avengers and JLA rosters are selected this way.) This will affect power designs.

I suggested with the ship name *Odyssey* the PCs could have powers mapped to Greek Heroes, but the players shot this down. David had been mulling quantum/wormhole/gravity powers, which wasn't very mythical. Asha wanted marine animal powers. Those didn't match each other, so theme powers got ditched.

12) Finally, what are your heroes' powers, and how powerful are they? This question is last to emphasize the other supers character aspects.

David added intangibility, anti-gravity leaps and open-ended "quantum powers" to his wormholes, and it became clear that he would be broadly potent, but not a heavy hitter. All the players pitched things to do with quantum powers, helping David play the genius physicist.

Asha's core idea was bio-luminescence and pigmentation invisibility. Group discussion turned this into mutated skin that also absorbed 0_2 from water, became frictionless for high-speed swimming, boosted her strength, protected her from cold, and generated electricity; they also made her team logo a tattoo and put her into a bikini for some fan service. Not as flexible as the others, Asha has a laundry list of defined tricks. Stephen had the image welding with a fingertip and slicing steel with his hand, and the group snowballed that into short-range thermal powers, including a bullet-melting heat field and ice creation. That turned a one-trick pony power into a more potent one. I was pushing for that, as the game was a teaching tool on high-end heroes rather than the adventurers with limited powers that Stephen gravitated toward.

The Thirteenth Question: Niche Protection.

Super teams in games normally have concerns about niche protection: making sure each PC contributes something unique. While this questionnaire, gestalt personalities and leagues stress that powers aren't the only niche indicators, players understandably don't want teammates whose powers make theirs irrelevant.

One way to prevent this is investing in their niche with a Signature Cost. Players spend extra points to stake out powers, and any future character must match that cost to duplicate the power. If two players want the same power during character creation they can bid on it, one can abandon it, or they can come to some other price arrangement if they agree to share it. Essentially, the players are determining the frequency of certain powers in the game world.

The old Mayfair *DC Heroes* had something similar, with powers having a Base Cost which combined general utility, campaign restrictions and rarity in the DC Universe. Signature Costs are different because the first player (or the GM) to build a character with a power sets the cost for all who follow. This isn't meant to block "energy blast" or "flight," but instead the methods used to get those effects in game: the hows of the power rather than the whats. For powers producing similar effects via a different method, the signature cost should be at least half of the PC-driven one.

For example, Stephen wanted to make his heat-based physique iconic so he paid 10 extra points in Signature Cost. If I-as-GM built another character with a flaming hand, bullet melting flame field, etc., I'd have to spend 10 points as well. If I included a pyrokinetic who caused things to combust on sight the minimum Signature Cost would be 5 points, as the power is visually and systematically distinct. However, if I wanted pyrokinesis to be equally rare I could spend all 10, or even more, to lock in that niche. Even if I spent 20 points to keep pyrokinesis unique, the future cost of flame based abilities (say, a flame-gun, or fire animation) is still based on the *player's* initial investment of 10 points -- the first entry is the baseline when setting Signature Costs. Finally, a character with a lighting blast and an electrical field that defected bullets would be able to set an entirely different Signature Cost for electrical powers, even though both powers have energy blasts and offensive force fields.

Continuing the example, Dave invested a high Signature Cost in wormhole generation -- he wanted teleportation to be rare, and his wormholes to be unique. Asha spent *no* points on water survival, because she wanted water-based adversaries. She did drop some into her chameleon-skinned invisibility, figuring that too many invisible people would make the power less useful. Stephen cannily set a low cost on ice generation, since his signature flames will let him cinematically dominate other ice generators.

Signature Cost is also a good tool for the GM. It makes it clear which abilities players consider important to their character concept. It also indicates which they *do* want to see duplicated: Dave set no Signature Cost on his martial arts or super-leaps because he *wants* wixua kung fu battles. It provides a fair metric for limiting some difficult powers: if no players have staked out super speed or mind control GMs can make those expensive signature powers for an NPC, limiting their appearances in the game world by a mechanic other than GM fiat. Finally, it makes this supers universe feel different from any other, as the frequency of powers will fall outside of the norms.

Signature Cost does not make sense for groups that are more concerned about the tactical aspects of supers: other methods of niche protection won't disturb the balance between the characters point cost and their in-game effectiveness. For groups who measure the characters effectiveness by screen time or unique concept it is a powerful tool for staking out territory, not just with the other players but with the GM.

* * *

Thanks to Stephen & Asha Shipman and David Bicking for acting as guinea pigs.

Mile High

for *GURPS*

by William H. Stoddard

Giants in fantasy campaigns are usually the size of very large animals; a typical giant might be anywhere from 12 to 50 feet tall (roughly SM +2 to +5). But legends and literature include some giants who are far larger, often so larger that they can be mistaken for part of the landscape, especially if they're asleep or dead. Some mythological giants are so huge that after they're killed, their dismembered bodies can be used to make the entire world. Other giants lie asleep beneath the landscape, like Finnegan in James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake,* who lies dreaming beneath present-day Dublin.

Mile High is a giant of the latter kind. Long ago, he fell asleep in a valley between high mountains. He slept so long that erosion covered him, making him look like a row of hills. Later, human settlers came up the river that flowed past his sleeping form, and built on its banks, and then up the slopes of his buried form. The town they built, Goldenstream, became a center of trade, where human and dwarven miners brought the products of their miners and sold them for food, clothing, and luxury goods; but it also was a center of magic, because its hills are a high-mana area where anyone can learn and cast spells.

Most of the town's residents have no idea what lies sleeping beneath their basements. The older dwarves of the surrounding mountains have records of Mile High, but they don't talk about him much; for one thing, they're afraid that saying his name might wake him up. There are rumors about him, ranging from fairly accurate to wildly distorted.

Mile High isn't actually a full mile high; he stands 4,400 feet tall. The early explorers who glimpsed him awake rounded off. None of them wanted to come close enough for him to notice them!

Campaign Uses

Mile High can be used in a campaign in two different ways: He can be a passive, sleeping presence for player characters to investigate, or he can actually wake up and take action that they have to deal with.

To start with, he can be an urban legend. This approach can work even if he doesn't actually exist; the legend may be based on the shape of the hills above Goldenstream and on the human tendency to anthropomorphize what we perceive. On the other hand, it may derive from sightings of Mile High before he fell asleep -- or was cast asleep by some potent enchantment. Adventurers looking for information may hear of him in tavern gossip or read about him in some archive of decaying scrolls.

Or his existence may be better known than that. Miners or architects tunneling under the city may have dug deep enough to find strata of tough skin; they may even have caused local earthquakes when their efforts to dig through his hide troubled his sleep. Or mages may have investigated the source of the high local mana levels, tracing the mana flow beneath the ground, or even seeing the outlines of parts of his sleeping form. Perhaps his entire form can be seen from the air, by a mage who has mastered flight spells.

If such investigations have been going on for a long time, he may even be a military or political asset. The town's rulers may know secret rituals that can awaken him, in some last extremity of danger, to fight against a besieging army, at the cost of the mansions built on his slopes, and perhaps of his stepping on a few buildings. Or some power-hungry sorcerer may be working on spells to awaken him, control him, or tap his vast store of mana. He could even be a potential ally for the city's commoners, in a storyline about medieval class struggle -- an embodiment of revolution in physical form, to be awakened when the time is right.

If he actually starts to wake up, a team of wizardly adventurers may be called upon to put him to sleep again. This will probably call for ceremonial magic; casting Sleep on him is going to cost 68 energy and take 30 seconds, and the caster will face substantial penalties if he's far enough away for safety, especially if Mile High is still hidden underground, so multiple attempts may be needed. GMs should assume that once Mile High is sent to sleep again, he'll go on sleeping after the Sleep spell wears off, unless some specific emergency wakes him.

If this spell doesn't work, or no one attempts it, adventurers may have to deal with a gigantic form wandering over the landscape, stepping on walls and buildings and scooping up entire herds of cattle or fields of grain for a snack. Any GM who has seen classic Japanese *daikaiju* ("giant monster") films will find suitable ways to develop this theme. Raw physical force, especially in a medieval setting, probably won't do any good, and may risk provoking Mile High's Bad Temper; even a ship's gun from the Age of Sail won't do more than sting him, though an entire broadside from a large ship might be able to cripple one of his limbs. Magical or alchemical equivalents of the "oxygen destroyer" from *Godzilla* would be a likelier weapon. Adventurers may be either the brilliant enchanters called in to create these, or the elite guards assigned to keep them safe while they devise their miracles.

On the other hand, it might be safer or more useful to befriend Mile High. He could just be sent off to sleep, perhaps with vast quantities of ale or brandy, or perhaps with multiple doses of a sleeping potion mixed into food or drink. In an "urban legend" treatment, the city could have an annual festival that looks back to such an incident; adventurers might gradually discover the story behind the public feasting, drinking, and reveling. Themes of class conflict might be woven into this, with the poor getting one good meal a year and a chance to swagger about the streets.

If the city is also faced with an invading army or some other threat, Mile High might be talked into helping fight it off. Adventurers might even need to keep him safe from the other side's enchantments. Or if the other side has a giant of its own, they could have to help him in a battle of titans -- again, a theme that can find inspiration in Japanese films!

A group of adventurers might even awaken Mile High deliberately, as a last resort against such a threat -- and hope they could gain his cooperation when he woke up. Getting the city's rulers to agree to this could be a story arc in its own right, given the amount of collateral damage that Mile High can cause. Or if the heroes of the story don't bother to ask for permission, they may have to flee the city after saving it.

Most of these approaches can be played out in varied styles. In a light fantasy, for example, Mile High may be more clumsy and boastful than malevolent; he can even be played as an inconvenient guest who's eating his hosts into the poorhouse. In a dark fantasy, he may treat human beings like annoying insects to be smashed, or even as hard-to-catch delicacies to be eaten. The mythic heroes of very high fantasy may even be able to deal with him as equals, like Hercules offering to hold up the sky for Atlas.

Character Description

Mile High   15,800 points

ST 7,500 (Size, -80%) [14,980]; *DX* 10 [0]; *IQ* 8 [-40]; *HT* 12 [20].
SM +17; Damage 751d/753d; BL 11,250,000 lbs.; HP 7,500 [0]; Will 12 [20]; Per 8 [0]; FP 12 [0].
Basic Speed 5.5 [0]; Basic Move 150 [725]; Dodge 8.
4,400'; 29.5 million tons.

Social Background

TL: 0
CF: Giant
Languages: Archaic Giant Speech (Native/None) [-3].

Advantages: Damage Resistance 10 [50]; Doesn't Breathe (Accessibility: When sleeping, -10%) [18]; Doesn't Eat or

Drink (Accessibility: When sleeping, -10%) [9]; Hard to Kill 4 [8]; Mana Enhancer 1 (Area Effect: 1 yard radius, +50%) [75]; Nictitating Membrane 2 [2]; Reputation +4 (Too dangerous to attack; always recognized; folklorists) [7]; Single-Minded [5]; Terrain Adaptation (Ordinary solid ground) [5]; Unaging [15]; Universal Digestion [5].

Perks: Accessory (Digging claws: can dig without a shovel); Penetrating Voice; Wakes up in emergencies. [3]

Disadvantages: Bad Temper (12) [-10]; Bestial [-10]; Innumerate [-5]; Low TL 4 [-20]; Poor [-15]; Sleepy (All the time) [-32]; Slow Riser [-5]; Social Stigma (Monster) [-15]; Stubbornness [-5].

Quirks: Alcohol Intolerance; Code of Honor (Will not cheat at riddle contests); Likes (Alcohol); Proud; Uncongenial. [-5]

Skills: Artillery (Bombs)-7 [1]; Brawling-10 [1]; Expert Skill (Bardic Lore)-6 [1]; Games (Riddles)-9 [2]; Intimidation-11 [1]; Survival (Mountains)-11 [12].

Notes: Given his massive weight, Mile High would normally be in danger of sinking into ordinary soil, and only able to walk on hard rock; his Terrain Adaptation lets him walk on any ground that would hold a normal man. His Penetrating Voice is not shrill, but a low rumble that shakes the ground and the walls of buildings. The cost of his Sleepy disadvantage is extrapolated from the standard table: a normal man sleeps 8 hours a day for 0 points, and each extra 4 hours a day is worth -8 points, so sleeping 24 hours a day is worth -32 points. His Perk lets him overcome his sleepiness in emergencies or major disturbances; he spends much less than 1/24 of his time awake, and has not awakened in decades.

Mile High's usual attack amounts to stepping on people or larger targets. This is a trample that inflicts 751d of crushing damage, almost always as a large area attack. He can also drop rocks on exceptionally tough foes. A rock dropped from a height of 3,600 yards has a terminal velocity of 200 yards/second (Move 200); if it weighs 5,600 tons (his Basic Lift), it has 1,790 HP and inflicts 3,580d of crushing damage. A round rock with this weight is about 17 yards in diameter (SM +8) and counts as a large area attack against a human-sized target. He typically spends a long time lining up each rock with its target: the maximum extra time bonus, +5, gives him an effective Artillery skill of 12.

Pyramid Review

Easter Island

Published by Twilight Creations, Inc.

Designed by Odet L'Homer & Roberto Fraga

Art by Kurt Miller

Layout & design by Kerry & Todd A. Breitenstein

16 plastic Moai pawns, mounted game board, Sun tokens, rulebook; full color, boxed, two players; $24.99

Easter Island. Strange. Alien. Imposing. Full of these big stone head thingies.

If you've not visited Wikipedia, this small island in the South Pacific is dotted with gi-normous stone heads called Moai, silent sentinels that stare out to sea. If you think that's the only attraction for tourists, though, think again. Twilight Creations, Inc. wants you to believe that these massive idols (?) are actually part of a great and magical contest played out between powerful but unsung mages from the history pages of *Easter Island.*

The object of the game is to eliminate most of your opponent's pieces before he takes out yours.

The game plays out on a map of the island, or more accurately a grid superimposed over it. In the center of the land, 25 points in a five-by-five square, connected by lines. Around the landmass, a circle with 20 points, five on all four sides, pointing inward toward the grid. The players start by placing four of their pieces each onto the grid; the pawns are in the shape of the great Moai heads (with a little bit of their body thrown in). Players then harness the rays of the sun to blast each other's heads into pieces.

Each turn, a player gets two actions: place a new Moai, rotate one already on the board, move one in a straight line, place a Sun token, or "fire" a Sun token. Moai only operate on the grid in the middle of the board, and the tokens are only placed on the circle. When you activate a Sun token, it shoots a concentrated beam of light toward the grid (flip the counter over -- it only shoots once, and no one can place another token on that space for the rest of this game). If it hits a statue from the front or back, it eliminates that unit. If it hits it from the left or right, however, that Moai reflects the ray in the direction it's facing. The same ray can bounce around the board several times without taking out anything if it keeps striking things from the side; in this case, it destroys the last unit hit or the first unit struck twice by that same beam. Play continues until one player is reduced to only one Moai on the board (so get those extras into play), in which case his opponent wins.

The board is a lovely piece, and something to marvel at in this day and age. Not that Twilight Creations normally puts out a chintzy component, but a full, mounted, foldout map board? It's a rare and dying breed, it is, and this one has a lush illustration of the island. And for $25? Perhaps not unheard of, but certainly worthy of note. The Moai units are really nice, plastic, with quality sculpting and triangular bases that players can have endless fun with even before the game begins, lining them up in new patterns. The worst bit in the game is the Sun tokens, partly because they're "just" punch-outs that pale by the unfair comparison to the other components; and partly because, while the black tokens are readily recognizable, the gray can blend into the board graphic in a few spots.

Something else you can usually count on Twilight Creations for: rules with unexplained holes in them. Nothing here

breaks the game, but if the players have to break from the game to discuss a point, it can kill the mood. Can you destroy your own units with your sun rays? It seems pretty clear you can (and that such a danger adds to the challenge), but that's the sort of thing a gamer likes to have spelled out for him, lest he be savaged by rules lawyers. The beginning of the instructions make it sound like a statue is needed to focus the sunlight's power, but you can shoot someone directly with your Sun token -- that kind of thing.

But underneath the featherweight complaints is a good, solid, playable game, the sort of exciting new strategy exercise that fills the void when classics like chess or **Feudal** are too heavy. There are ways to cleverly turn the tables to your advantage, and the game strikes a fine balance between forcing you to think about your approach and keeping the mechanics simple enough to let you work your will on the outcome. Although the backstory on the box is more overly fanciful than you'd expect, the execution of **Easter Island** is far more substantial.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Karak Azgal: Adventures of the Dragon Crag (for *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*)

Developed by Green Ronin Publishing

Published by Black Industries

Designed & Written by William Simoni with Robert J. Schwalb

Cover by Mark Gibbons

Interior Art by Alex Boyd, Tony Parker, & Adrian Smith

Cartography by Robert Lazzaretti

98-Page Black & White Hardback; $24.99

Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay does not do dungeons. *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* has never done dungeons. Well actually, neither statement is true. In their original incarnation, the *Doomstones Trilogy* for the game's first edition were adventures designed for *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons, First Edition,* and if some of the locations described therein were not dungeons . . . As for the new second edition of the game, the arrival of *Karak Azgal: Adventures of the Dragon Crag* gives almost all of a dungeon that a Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay GM could ever need.

In the case of Karak Azgal, it not only gives, it also takes. Quite literally so, because not only do the adventurers have to pay to get into the dungeon, they also get taxed on the way out! Of course, dungeon delving as an industry is not new, having been seen before in the *Big Rubble* for *RuneQuest* and *Parlainth: City of Adventure* for *Earthdawn.* Indeed it can be seen in the recently released *Ptolus, City of Adventure.*

Nevertheless, the straight dungeon of classic gaming is still alien to the Old World of *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay,* so it is no surprise that both it and this supplement is set far away from the game's center of action in the Empire. Karak Azgal is located far to the South between the Badlands and the Border Princes, beyond the Black Fire Pass at the end of the World's Edge Mountains. Just getting there is an adventure in itself! (Though that lies outside the scope of this supplement.)

Karak Azgal was once Karak Izril, a wealthy Dwarf hold that fell to attack from above ground by Orcs, and below by Skaven. It became home to a dragon; the dragon's riches that were taken eventually by the Dwarf who killed the dragon, Skalf the Dragonslayer, to rebuild the city as Karak Azgal. It sits above Dragon Tail Pass, on top of a complex of underground passages, shafts, rooms, caves, temples, homes, and mines that reaches deep underground. There are riches to be had for the brave adventurer, from coins and gems to metal ore and Dwarfen artifacts, but the Dwarfs of Karak Azgal do not want any of their lost treasures to fall into the wrong hands. To prevent this, access to the various entrances below are tightly controlled and guarded, charging a toll to all who enter, and taxing everything brought out. That is, if they do not confiscate them outright. Of course, if the adventurers deplete the Goblin, Orc, or Skaven population at the same time, all the better then for no Dwarfen life has been lost.

Despite the tight controls, the prospect of wealth is still a draw for many, not just adventurers, but entrepreneurs,

businessmen, thieves, and con artists, who mostly reside in Deadgate, the lawless, ramshackle shanty town outside of Karak Azgal. Open 24 hours a day, it is dominated by pleasure palaces, gambling dens, fighting pits, and taverns, all dominated by a single crime lord who hates the Cult of Ranald, the god of thieves. Perhaps the most amusing of the drinking establishments is the Halfling-run Appleberry Tavern, best known for the game, "Moot Darts." This is not your normal game of darts, requiring a player to throw the darts as outlandishly as possible, and his opponent to match the maneuver. This can be as simple as throwing the darts back between your legs while blindfolded or as absurd as throwing while being tossed into the air on a blanket!

The bulk of this supplement is devoted to describing the dungeon below Karak Azgal. Given that it consists of 11 levels (and the book just 98 pages), it is no surprise that only a few parts of it are fully detailed. These are of two types, either the headquarters for each of the factions within the dungeon -- Goblins, Orcs, and Skaven -- or a site of significance. The less dangerous of the two sites described is the Hall of Bones, a Dwarfen crypt, while the other is not somewhere that the delving characters want to be unless they have several careers under their belt. To put that single encounter on a par with the Balrog of Moria, and both the challenge and degree of peril involved is about right.

With only these few individual locations (marked on a cutaway view of Karak Azgal) described in detail and only the very first level mapped in broad detail, the rest of the dungeon is left for the GM to create. In just a few pages, he is given everything necessary bar imagination. Covered are the different environments to be found below, plus possible dangers and treasures to be found, including arms and armor made from the near mythical metal, Gromril. Also given is a small selection of special encounters, and a few new monsters particular to Karak Azgal. The core tool though is the set of encounter tables designed to create the basics of the encounter. The tables work well enough on their own, but to get the fullest out of them, the GM will need access to the *Old World Bestiary* and *Children of the Horned Rat,* the Skaven sourcebook.

If *Karak Azgal: Adventures of the Dragon Crag* has a precedent, it is in Middle Earth's Moria. It falls into the same mold, being an abandoned Dwarfen hold, populated by Orcs, Goblins, and various chaos beasties, including a big threat in the deeps below. To this basic set-up, the authors add a *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay twist,* beginning with the dungeon's entry toll and exit taxes. Others include the mad game of "Moot Darts," a Wight seeking allies, a suddenly popular new Dwarf cult, bets being placed on the survival of dungeoneering teams, characters becoming known after a couple of trips inside, and -- helping to set a suitably grim feel -- characters being able to pay for a funeral in advance should an expedition go awry.

Physically, this supplement is competently written, and includes a range of good art. It would have been nice to have seen more of the NPCs illustrated, and it is a pity that the occasional illustration does not match the description given in the text.

However, *Karak Azgal: Adventures of the Dragon Crag* does suffer from what it is -- a dungeon and a toolkit. It suffers because *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* does not do dungeons and in order to do so, this book has been placed a long way away from the game's geographical heart. This makes it difficult to transpose a campaign there, so it is probably best run in isolation, focusing on a mix of dungeon delving and a "city of thieves"-style game. It suffers because as a dungeon, it could be argued that not enough of it is detailed. That though, is down to the book's design and limited page count. To be fair though, there is everything here for the GM to create a campaign of his own. Still, the book does feel a little slim for what you get.

As a toolkit, Karak Azgal: Adventures of the Dragon Crag achieves what it sets out to do -- provide a complete campaign setting that the GM can develop as he wants. It also bridges the gap in playing styles between *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* and *Dungeons & Dragons* in giving a dungeon bash that is grim and perilous, as is the settlement above it. *Karak Azgal: Adventures of the Dragon Crag,* then, is proof that *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* can do dungeons and still keep to the feel and flavor of the Old World.

--Matthew Pook

Irregular Webcomic

![?]

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

![?]

Irregular Webcomic

![?]

Invest a Gate With New Ideas

You are all gatekeepers.

No, I don't mean that you are all Sigourney Weaver (although, I suppose, at least one of you might be). Rather, each and every one of you controls the flow of an almost limitless number of products and ideas, without even realizing it.

I first started thinking about this notion after running a column a few weeks ago about the lack of innovation in mainstream offerings at my Friendly Local Game Shops. Many people responded that there's a heck of a lot of innovation going on in the gaming world, but it's mostly happening over in the small press world. Via e-mail and over in the message boards I replied that I wasn't completely ignorant of that universe, but that (for the most part) your small-press offerings weren't really making it into the gameshops of the universe. And, given that most non-first-tier RPGs are lucky if it can sell 5,000 copies of a book, "small press" is pretty small, indeed.

But that wasn't the point of my column (although, I assure you, the small press *is* on my radar, and I'm calculating feverishly about how to best bring some insight into that world's offerings to you, our loyal readers). Rather, I was more interested in noting what's going on in actual brick-and-mortar shops, which have defined the gaming world for the past few decades.

Of course, your typical FLGS isn't the be-all and end-all of the gaming universe. However, it is a *gatekeeper.* In fact, it's usually the last gatekeeper keeping product from consumers who happen to be wandering the halls. (Depending on your worldview, the staff at said FLGS might serve as additional gatekeepers above and beyond the store's intention. I'm familiar with stores that have stocked the items I wish to purchase, but where the store personnel are unable or unwilling to find or provide. Conversely, I also helped introduce would-be buyers to a number of different games in my tenure as Game Shop Monkey; I sold at least a dozen copies of **Changeling: The Dreaming** to vaguely-game-interested readers of *Sandman* by thrusting it into their hands and saying, "Flip through this! Isn't this the most beautiful game book you've ever seen!?")

The gatekeeper prior to your FLGS is the distribution system, which consists of vast warehouses controlled by ruthlessly calculating steam-powered Artificial Intelligences whose true inner workings can only be fathomed by their cogwork parents who died generations ago. At least, that's how it seems to those in the publishing and retail world.

And prior to that world is the gatekeeper of the publishers. Publishers have their own visions, which usually consist of vague dreams of sleeping curled up, dragon-like, on a huge mound of gold. Of course, publishers can only publish so much, and most publishers already have their own ideas that they can barely bring to fruition, let alone consider bringing to market any of umpteen jillion unsolicited ideas.

So what's the upshot of this? Namely, that your Friendly Local Game Shop is the result of at least two -- and probably three -- layers of gatekeeping selectivity. In other words, products that reach the shelves needed to do so by jumping over at least three hurdles.

Now, here's the point in the article where I reveal a shocking secret: I enjoy pretending I'm a naughty squirrel. No, wait . . . that's a confession for another publication. Where was I? Oh, right; confession.

See, for the most part, I appreciate the role that the three-tiered gatekeepers play. In a perfect world, this system has managed to weed away the chaff, like the multi-level filtration system in a Brita water pitcher that can turn cheap vodka into something yummy. Now, of course it doesn't work that way; for many fans of good games -- myself included -- the system tends to exclude a number of (potentially) perfectly good games while including a nontrivial number of stinkers. But, on the whole, the system has usually worked out pretty well; by the time I'm able to peruse a new game at a game shop, I have a certain level of assurance. Most of this fuzzy feeling boils down to, "Well, at least three different groups of people believed in this product enough to bring it here."

Of course, the problem comes when the number of games offered is too small, or have too much in common. My old

haunt of I-Can't-Believe-It's-Not-Philadelphia had this problem when it came to dining: Literally *every* restaurant within a 20-mile radius was a pizza parlor, an Italian restaurant, or a Chinese buffet. The only Mexican restaurant (my favorite) we ever found was in the neighboring state of Delaware, where it was within 200 yards of a Taco Bell. Now, the fact remains that just about every pizza, Italian, or Chinese place we visited was top-notch, but that didn't change an overwhelming dissatisfaction with the general level of variety. This situation neatly parallels my recent experiences with Friendly Game Shops; not much variety, but in general almost everything on the shelves is at least pretty darn good.

But without those gatekeepers, I'm not sure I'd ever be able to make any kind of decision. Pulling numbers out of . . . well, you don't want to know where . . . I would guess that the gaming world has approximately 100 SKUs per week from all sources (new items, reprints, individual versus multipacks, electronic, small press, card & board games, mass market, etc.). This guess doesn't count video games, DVDs, or anything like that, nor does it consider any of the myriad items released to the regular publishing world that might be of interest to gamers. Now, assuming that I can devote one minute per product, that means I could spend almost two of my 112 waking hours per week considering products. I don't know about anyone else, but I can't even get through Amazon's ever-updating "We recommend you buy this" list on the front page, carefully chosen by their merciless AIs; I'd hate to have to consider *all* items available.

As a result, I suspect that we all rely on gatekeepers to keep the number of products we consider to a remotely manageable number. But, at least in the RPG world, I suspect the primary gatekeeper will become -- if it hasn't already -- word of mouth. In other words, you'll hear about products from others, and others will hear about products from you. While this isn't anything particularly revolutionary in and of itself -- the gaming world has always relied on folks spreading the word about good stuff -- the past few years have presented one of the first times where you, as a gatekeeper, can be the *only* gatekeeper of note.

For example, let's party like it's 1994 for a second, and you hear about a cool-looking game from those crazy upstarts at Last Unicorn Games called ***Aria: Canticle of the Monomyth.*** Well, having heard about it, you now need to acquire it somehow. But how? If your FLGS doesn't stock it -- a likely possibility -- then you either need to special-order it (a chancy proposition for many local shops), call one of the telephone-based retailers (such as Wargames West), hope to find it at a convention, or do without. Regardless of the option you choose, you're looking at a minimum wait of a week, and a maximum wait of never.

Jump forward to . . . now. You've heard about a great game called ***My Life With Master.*** You shell out $8.95, and -- hours later -- you're downloading the product, complete with enough digital information to print out an exact replica of the paper product the author also offers. From a wait of "a week to never" to "a few hours" -- not a bad compression for just over a decade. And, of course, all manner of other products is available via other means -- electronic (RPGnow, DriveThru, e23) and online (Warehouse 23, Paizo, Amazon). The minimum wait may still be a week or so, but that's a "darn-near guaranteed" week, not a "if the stars align and Cthulhu doesn't awaken saying, 'Grawg; how long have I slumbered, and what's this taste in my mouth?'" week.

Which means the only gatekeeper of note for many of these products is you, or someone like you. Of course, the way that you (or someone like you) hears about these new products is via other yous, and other nebulous means of getting the word out that exist outside this already-wordy column.

But, as a final food for thought, consider that if you convince your friends to buy three copies of a small-to-mid-sized RPG, this means that you're probably directly responsible for at least 0.1% of that product's print run (as much as a full 1%+ of a small-press offering). If the FLGS no longer represents the be-all and end-all of consumer-level gatekeeping (and, in some ways, I morn this), then the power that affords each of us as our own gatekeepers is considerable.

Of course, half of power is knowing when and how to use it. But, for now, I'd encourage everyone to wield that gatekeeping power. And -- to tap into my old high-school writing class -- "be specific." Don't be afraid to talk about things you love in specific terms ("If you like *Sin City,* you'll love this game . . .") and don't be afraid to check out recommendations from your fellow Terrans. Gatekeepers only have power so long as folks get near the gate . . . whether that gate is a FLGS, a website, or your own gaming table.

* * *

Confidential To Many: Yes, I know my column [last week](#) ended abruptly. The last sentence of what-I'd-hoped-sounded-like-a-concluding paragraph was, "What if unanswered rhetorical questions were seen as immoral, and punishable by dea" . . . get it? I was killed for asking an unanswered rhetorical question! Hah!

Nevertheless, here is the rest of the column, for those of you who wish to copy and paste it yourselves:

th?

--Steven Marsh

* * *

As one last item, *Pyramid* is deeply saddened to note the passing of [John M. Ford](#).

In addition to his regular contributions to the [discussion boards](#) (the .sigs of which were cited by many as reason enough to subscribe to *Pyramid*), every so often Mr. Ford would post some rumination, insight, or witticism about an item in the Daily Illuminator. A small part of me kept hoping against hope to see a comment from him about the Illuminator reporting his own passing; it would, no doubt, be the perfectly written coda to a life that was as brilliant as it was brief.

Perhaps, somewhere in the infinite worlds, there is such a post right now.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Faery's Tale

Published by Firefly Games

Written by Patrick Sweeney, Sandy Antunes, & Christina Stiles with Keith Sears & Spike Y Jones

Fiction by Robin D. Laws

Cover by Patricia Ann Lewis-MacDougall

Illustrated by Patricia Ann Lewis-MacDougall & Jennifer Meyer

64-Page Digest Size Black & White Perfect Bound Book; $14.95
66-Page 3.30 Mb Black & White PDF; $9.95

Faery's Tale is a little game about the little people. Where other RPGs about faeries turn them into savage creatures or slip them into urban settings, *Faery's Tale* places them firmly in the tradition of British folklore. More specifically though its artwork -- reminiscent of Arthur Rackham, Ivy Wallace, Tony DiTerlizzi, and Enid Blyton -- it echoes the children's tales of a more innocent golden age. There is a timeless quality to this game that could place it any time from the Edwardian period to the 1950s.

In fact, innocence lies at the heart of *Faery's Tale.* This is shown first in the roles taken by the players, mischievous but good-at-heart inches-tall faeries -- Brownies, Pixies, Pookas, and Sprites. Second is the setting, the deep forests of Brightwood, wherein the faeries not only romp and play, but also guide lost children to safety; thwart the plans of dark faeries, goblins, and sorcerers; awaken princesses from deep slumber; and rescue those captured by giants. And third in the game being specifically aimed at children of ages.

Brownies can turn invisible at will and use magic to help keep hearth and home for a family of humans. Pixies are winged pranksters capable of feats of magic by sprinkling a little faery dust, from casting or breaking charms to making someone fly or putting them to sleep. Pookas are naughty tricksters who can change into animals and travel great distances using those forms. Sprites are Brightwood's knights, riding bumblebee or dragonfly steeds to defend against dark faeries and goblins.

Each faery is defined by three attributes -- Body, Mind, and Spirit -- and his Gifts, both innate and selected by the player. He also possesses Essence, magical life force that can be spent to do more extraordinary things. He adds three more points to the base attributes for his faery type, to give a rating of between one and six, and spends five points gain extra Gifts, ranging from Brave and Charming to Seer, Sidekick, and Sneaky. A Gift either gives a bonus under certain circumstances, for example, Brave increases a faery's Spirit by +2 when handling Bravery tests, or cost Essence to use, such as Seer, which lets a faery see far away for one Essence and into the past or future for two.

Mechanically, *Faery's Tale* is light and easy. It uses pools of six-sided dice equal to an attribute to overcome any challenge. Every even number rolled counts as a success, with any six rolled counted as a success and allowing a further roll. If a faery cannot attain enough successes, he can spend Essence at a cost of one per success needed. Faeries can also co-operate to overcome obstacles, simply pooling their dice pools to roll for more successes.

Combat or duels are likewise easily handled, using the Body attribute for physical duels and Spirit for magical. The combatants split the pool into Attack and Defense pools, the number of successes being compared to determine the outcome. If a faery faces more than one opponent, then he must decide how many attack dice to assign between them, but he uses the same defense pool against them all.

At the heart of the game is Essence. Representing a faery's life force, not only can it be spent to attain successes and power Gifts, it can also be used to purchase a clue from the Narrator (who then conveys it within the game) or even a Plot Twist. This turns the story to the faery's advantage and can be as simple as gaining a momentary benefit to overcome an obstacle or as complex as altering the storyline. Any Plot Twist requires careful judgment by the Narrator.

Whenever Essence is lost -- whether through duels, fuelling Gifts, or buying Plot Twists -- a faery is never really hurt. Indeed, once it reaches zero, a faery is not dead as in other RPGs, but is forced into a deep slumber until his life force has regenerated. This takes as long as the Narrator feels is necessary. However, Essence can be gained as a reward for playing within the genre -- being brave, generous, never being disheartened at setbacks, learning from mistakes, and so on. It can also be gained for suggesting Complications that add further challenge to a game, but which must also be fun for everyone playing. Both Plot Twists and Complications promote creative thought and input upon the part of the players.

Much like *Star Wars,* Essence has its counterpart in Dark Essence, gained for committing acts of cruelty, cowardice, greed, or wrongdoing. Each point of Dark Essence gained reduces a faery's Essence, until he is fully tainted by Dark Essence, at which point he is transformed. If he willingly gives his heart up to evil, then this is into a Goblin, but if he still retains a mote of goodness, then there is still hope. He still transfoms, a Brownie into a Boggart, who torments households with pranks; Sprites into bullying Redcaps; Pixies into Wisps, who lure strangers into danger; and Pookas into Phoukas, who terrify villages with beastly nighttime rages. Dark Essence can be overcome if a Dark Faery refrains from committing bad deeds, but it is a long and difficult process.

Goblins and Dark Faeries are just part of the bestiary that includes ordinary people, the animals of Brightwood, and the more fantastic creatures, such as Hags, Trolls, Dragons, and Sorcerers. It is a short bestiary, but using the list of Gifts a Narrator could easily fashion more creatures, whether inspired by faery tales or adapted from other gaming supplements, *GURPS Faerie* being one good source. Indeed, the given scenario is based on the faery tale, *Jack and the Beanstalk.* The advice on creating adventures is decent, but a bibliography would also have been useful. There is still plenty of information or faery lore given throughout the book, being a ready source of ideas to help the Narrator either create adventures or add color to them.

Being specifically written in mind for play with children aged six and older, there is advice throughout the book aimed at helping a Narrator run a game for them. For example, it suggests using Essence rewards as a teaching tool to help reinforce behavior both within and without the game. It also describes at what ages a child can deal with particular aspects of *Faery Tale:* moral issues, social skills, and so on. In the main it tells you which aspects of the rules are not suited to younger players, particularly the dueling rules, the moral complexities inherent to Dark Essence, and the possibility that one of their faery's companions might die. The advice is pertinent and interesting, and probably covers the subject more than any other RPG. Yet it is only a good start. Certainly it could easily be applied to other child-friendly RPGs like Deep7's ***Buggin' RPG: The Tiny Game of Big Adventures*** and Beyond Belief Games' ***Lashings of Ginger Beer,*** but hopefully a future supplement will expand what is given here.

More long-term rewards come in the form of titles, noble ranks from knight to prince; boons, which are favors promised; items blessed with magic called charms. Boons are both the currency between faeries within the game and similar to experience points outside of it. Boons can be spent to acquire items and aid, improve attributes and acquire new Gifts, and even open passages to far-away places like the Moon and the faery realm of Water. Once a faery has a title, he can trade boons, but the real aim is to acquire them. Of course, boons are the perfect story hook for the Narrator.

In addition to the suggestions on making the game easier, *Faery's Tale* offers other optional rules and methods of play. These include point-based faery creation, adding Passions so that a faery can be led by his heart, running a game dice-

less, and adding Live Action elements so that children can enjoy dressing up for the game as much as they do playing it.

Bar the lack of bibliography, *Faery's Tale* is a nicely done book. The illustrations are a delight and perfectly match the genre, and whilst Robin D. Laws' color fiction is a bit twee, it nevertheless captures the feel of the genre. Hopefully, it will likewise help the Narrator capture that feel.

Despite the old fashioned theme, *Faery's Tale* is still a contemporary game with light mechanics that are easily scaled up or down in complexity to suit the players, and in the use of Plot Twists and Complications which gives those players the opportunity to add to the game. These aspects of the game should appeal to more experienced players, while at the same time *Faery's Tale's* simplicity, scaling, advice, and theme make it suited to running for a younger audience. After years of trying to get away from the faery tales of our childhood, usually by transplanting the faery elsewhere, *Faery's Tale* takes you back to an innocent age with a delightfully designed little game.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Monkey Memory

Published by [Playroom Entertainment](#)

Designed by Reinhard Staupe

Art by Oliver Freudenreich

50 playing cards & instructions (English, French, & Spanish); boxed, full color, for two to eight players; $8

Playroom Entertainment seems to have more imprints and marketing adaptations than the average gamer has dice in a bag. A purveyor of quick, easy games that can be enjoyed by the whole family, they've cast a pretty wide net to catch as many clan-friendly sets as they can. Although many of the games target kids and their parents, one of their imprints, Bright Idea Games, looks to the far younger end of the spectrum. By way of example: *Monkey Memory.*

One of the company quirks the game shares with others from the Playroom team: The backstory is only to be found on the back of the box. Not that it's all that complicated -- the monkeys have gotten loose, and they're rummaging through your stuff. They've taken an item, and you have to figure out which one. To help you keep track, players (two to eight of them) are assigned a Solution Card that shows all the pieces used in the game.

Each Object Card depicts one everyday item (well, okay, coconuts are here as well, but surely they're found in *someone's* house). A cell phone, a watch, a ring of car keys, the sort of stuff you'd find in a person's backpack. Oh, and the backpack. The things on the cards all have a twin, so there are two each of all the items. Seven pairs of these cards are chosen, and one of the sets is laid out in a line in the middle of the playing surface. The other set of cards gets shuffled up, and one card is removed from that deck. The spare card gets tossed in the box or set aside somewhere no one can see it, and the dealer then begins turning over the rest of those cards. (The oldest player goes first, freeing up the young ones to concentrate on the cards and giving them a grace period to see how things are done.)

Players have to pay attention as the cards are revealed one after the other, trying to note what does and doesn't come up. The cards are stacked as they're revealed, so you only get one look at each. When the last card is flipped, the whole deck is turned upside down. Everyone looks over the visible line of cards, then places their thumb on their Solution Card, covering the item they think was removed from the dealt set. Those who guess right get a Point Card. After each player has had the chance to be the dealer twice, the person with the most points wins.

Some games have sturdy pieces, and some take pains to see that small kids can run roughshod over their components without destroying them, but it feels like you could block a satellite signal with these cards. They're really thick, and the illustrations will delight the urchins no end. Bright and colorful but by no means simple, they'll catch the youngsters' eyes.

Looking at it realistically, there's not much here you can't also do with a regular deck of cards and a pad and pencil. On the other hand, those won't have the same childlike sense of fun attached to them, the same palette of colors and images that stir young minds, so in that respect it's worth the eight bucks to give the family something a bit less generic. And of course, the game is meant for those who've only reached their fifth year, so they'd chew through a deck of lesser materials like piranha.

You can increase or decrease the game's difficulty by simply using more or fewer of the 10 card pairs included, depending on the kid's age. (And if you'd like to trick your offspring into learning even more, have them read the rules

themselves -- they're once again presented in English, Spanish, and French.) Game play lacks the same strategic considerations Playroom Entertainment manages to stick into most of its products, so there's definitely an age range for which it loses its relevance, but the memory challenge can be good practice for adults when you're using all 10 pairs. The real problem is trying to strike a balance over the generation gap -- unless there's some way to handicap mom and dad (make them memorize two cards?), your standard parent is going to sail through whatever number the kids find digestible. The elders are probably used to pulling their punches in a game, but it may be required here since there's no built-in mechanic that levels the playing field.

Monkey Memory is still not a bad entry to gaming for the youngest of gamers (or the mental exercises, if that's all you want out of it for them), but it's not without its flaws and requires a bit of jiggery-pokery if you want it to have wide family appeal.

--Andy Vetromile

Murphy's Rules

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Infant Diversity In Infant Combinations

"Children are wormholes. They're portals into the unreachable future and unattainable past."
"Well, I could see why you'd have some trouble selling a woman on the idea of carrying your wormhole."
--Larry & Amita, *NUMB3RS*

As I've stated elsewhere in an article this week, I think kids are an under-represented portion of many games -- especially RPGs. While this certainly isn't true for everyone (I've participated in at least two campaigns where children have played a central role), it's certainly been the case for many adventures I've played in. This is despite the fine pedigree that adventuring kids have: *DuckTales, Goonies, Mary Poppins* (or practically any 1960s-1970s Disney live-action movie). And, of course, kids play compelling roles in practically all genres and tales, from horror *(The Sixth Sense* and *The Omen)* to comedy *(Sleepless in Seattle* and *Finding Nemo)* to drama *(The Godfather* and *Grave of the Fireflies)* to action/suspense *(Witness* and *Aliens))* to science fiction *(Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* to *My Eyes Don't Work Because I Just Poked Them Out With a Fork At Remembering That Wretched Movie).*

This speculation is not merely idle on my part, but rather hits close to home this week. Because this week Nikki (the inimitable missus) and I were happy to introduce Samuel James Vrtismarsh to the *Pyramid* family. Born on Friday, September 29th (less than a day after last *Pyramid* was posted), Samuel is the culmination of nine months of my not doing a darn thing outside of being sympathetic. And, at eight pounds one ounce and 20.5", Samuel has proven that I must be capable of being pretty darn sympathetic.

Samuel!

Samuel has already proven a major source of excitement and adventure in our lives. Although his arrival into this world was without complications, within 17 hours of our arrival home, a generally lethargic baby coupled with some red in the diaper, resulting in the doctor's recommendation to go to the Emergency Room immediately, where we spent *another* two days under observation. Net result: The kid's fine; he, like so many other babies, just hadn't figured out the whole "eating" thing yet. (I'm amazed that we as a species have managed to progress to the point of being almost incapable of producing offspring that are remotely viable. I mean, I don't envision platypi needing to consult with lactation consultants to get their kids to eat: "Okay; you need to keep them awake so they know to keep eating. Have you tried stripping off their fur? Or maybe adjusting the temperature so it's a bit colder . . . perhaps you could wait for an ice age? Oh, and make sure he purses his beak around your nipple. That's it . . ." And I'm also constantly amazed that, as best I can tell from all the baby advice books and the words of doctors, babies left unsupervised for 1.8 nanoseconds will manage to find some lethal situation, device, or position. But I digress.)

As more and more gamers pair up and form the Next Generation of gamerly goodness, I'm interested in seeing how (or if) the gaming world will keep up with them. While the pessimist or cynic in me thinks that parenthood might bring nothing but gamerly negatives -- I have barely enough time to think about a shower nowadays, let alone when our next game is -- part of me is still cautiously optimistic.

Perhaps my eyes are merely now focusing on them with new sight, but I'm seeing more and more games targeting kids. Most promisingly, I'm seeing games that can be enjoyed by children *or* adults; there's nothing keeping anyone from mixing in the **Family Fluxx** cards into the regular **Fluxx** deck, although obviously a group of college students will get something different out of the experience than a family of five. I hope this trend continues, because I believe that the next generation of memorable games is waiting to be played and enjoyed by today's nine-year-olds; I know of several gamers who got hooked on the hobby through their exposure to games such as **HeroQuest, Dungeon,** and **Talisman** (although seeing the type of rules . . . er, *debates* that erupted with adults playing the six-hour-long version of **Talisman** from the 1980s, I can only imagine what those games would have been like with younger, more easily frustrated players. Imagine . . . and shudder.)

So, to sate my growing curiosity of seeing what's been cooking from the gaming world that's for or about kids, our crack team of reviewers (Hi, Andy! Hi, Pookie!) found a few of the more interesting recent ones to grace this week's issue. Couple this with contributions from a few regulars who didn't run fast enough away from me, and we've got ourselves a certified child-themed issue.

As an aside, I've been out of contact for the past week or so (and let me tell you that staying for two nights in a hospital as a six-foot-tall guest on a 5'8" couch is no picnic), so I'm playing catchup now. I thank you all for your patience.

(Samuel thanks you too . . . by urping all over my shoulder.)

--Steven Marsh

The Secret World of Children

Abilities that Babies Possess which Others Do Not

by Steven Marsh

As adults, we look on the world of babies and children as being a time when almost every youngster held the (ultimately incorrect) belief that he has a special ability or secret power that no one else possesses. But what if this is false? What if there actually *are* abilities that children possess, but which -- for whatever reason -- are lost as adults and end up in the vaguest corners of adult recollection, memories of memories?

This article looks at some of the more common and justifiable methods of incorporating childhood "secret societies": broad classes of powers that children possess but adults do not. This isn't a ready-to-use toolkit, but more of a box of random parts, designed to be mixed and matched in interesting ways. Although many of these ideas suggest a child-specific campaign, they are also intended to provide ideas for adventures in otherwise adult-focused campaigns. For example, investigators in a Weird West campaign might learn of a plot where children in a town are disappearing . . . only to discover that one of the children in the group has been taking their number to the Land of Cowpoke Dreams. (Whether this turns out to be a heartwarming break between more serious adventures or the first step into a nightmare realm is up to the GM.)

Game Mechanics

Each idea listed below is given broad RPG mechanics for how these abilities might be represented. In general, one universal truth of childhood secrets is that they cannot be perceived by those who are not still kids. Thus parents could never see an imaginary friend or be able to travel to a Land of Make-Believe. In fact, adults usually serve as a *disruptive* effect; if a child were riding in the backyard on a camel made from a curved stick, the mere act of parents observing the youngster straddling the mount would cause it to revert back to its wooden form. (Classically, this "jamming" ability of older folks only works to the barest extent that the perception is accomplished; thus if an adult is listening to a child play with an "imaginary" miniature elephant through a baby monitor, the elephant would not be able to make any of its own distinctive sounds, although it could still act as a quiet pachyderm . . . and the child could provide his own trumpeting, should he be so inclined.)

In most campaigns, adults never know these abilities existed, or (at best) they rationalize away these powers through the eyes of maturity. To that end, regardless of how these powers manifest, they are usually gone at the point when the child's "adult" memory begins to form; in the "real" world, since almost no children retain memories before the age of three, this age is usually a good ending point for these powers. (Of course, cinematic children can push the envelope even further, and the realm of "kindergarten" is a good cinematic means of exposing four- to six-years-old kids to others to form adventuring groups, while not being *too* unrealistic a reason for doing so.)

Whether these powers fade away gradually or quickly depends on the campaign and the reasoning behind them. Perhaps the child finds it more and more a difficult to understand Babyese, or finds it harder to enter the Make-Believe. Regardless, the final departure of that language could be a poignant metaphor for the ending of early childhood, especially in RPGs such as ***Changeling.***

Of course, it's not essential for adults to be unable to perceive these manifestations. If this assumption isn't used, then there should be some other reasons why adults don't remember their encounters with childhood phenomenon (either from their own childhoods or from their more recent interactions with kids). Some possibilities include:

- Adults simply forget they encountered the oddity, either because of an intrinsic property of the childhood ability or because of some active usage of a separate special power tied to the first ability, such as an Imaginary Genie's ability to make an adult forget with a puff of magic dust. (The possibility of requiring something to be actively

done to an adult who has witnessed these powers creates interesting story possibilities from either end, with kids trying to track down errant adults to use the flashy-thing on them, or an adult who's learned The Secret trying to escape children.) If adults can see and interact with these oddities but forget afterwords, it allows for a variety of stories of adults and kids teaming up and working together, with the older one none the wiser that the "imaginary tea party" he remembers actually took place in the Court of the Princess of Daisies.

- Adults are somehow transformed or revert to their own childhoods when exposed to these powers. This is a variation on the idea above, permitting adults and children to work together. However, the adult actually undergoes a transformation (mental, physical, or both); he can interact with the child's abilities when transformed, but loses memories of them -- along with the changed form -- when the "story time" is over.
- Adult minds cannot comprehend the possibility of what they have witnessed. This would be a great justification for a creepy **Call of Cthulhu**-esque game; adult mortal minds are usually too sane to comprehend what they have witnessed. In addition, it allows for some interesting roleplaying possibilities for playing adults interacting with these kids and their powers; as the older ones' abilities to perceive the powers of the youngsters gets stronger, their own sanity gets called into question. ("Don't you understand?! That's no stuffed tiger! *That's no stuffed tiger!*")

Finally, as a weird (but intriguing) alternative, it's possible that adults *don't* forget. In this campaign, children simply possess abilities that adults do not, and their poor parents have little choice but to ride out the turmoil as best they can, hoping (and knowing) that it will end some day . . . not unlike puberty. This possibility would be well-suited for an already-odd setting, such as **In Nomine, GURPS IOU, Toon,** and some feasible settings for **Big Eyes, Small Mouth.** (After all, what is the *Pokémon* universe but a fully justified world where kids visit strange dream vistas with their imaginary friends?)

Imaginary People

"Little Jackie Paper loved that rascal Puff
And brought him strings and sealing wax and other fancy stuff."
Leonard Tipton & Peter Yarrow, --*Puff The Magic Dragon*

Given how small their forms are, one of the most powerful forces a child possesses is the power of imagination. In some respects, the imaginary playmate represents the pinnacle of childhood desire in a friend: nonjudgmental, willing (and able) to listen, and always available. Of course, adults see these companions as possessing one fatal flaw: They don't exist.

Or do they?

Imaginary friends seem to be just like "real" friends: children converse and "play" with them, and may even attempt to feed or otherwise comfort them.

In stories where adults are unable to perceive the workings of imaginary friends (or even interfere with their ability to exist), the abilities of these "figments" are somewhat limited. The most common role of these individuals is as advisor or confidant; imaginary friends can provide insight or advice (good or bad) in most situations. In this case, even in a campaign where adults act as a disruptive force, it might still be possible for an imaginary friend to play an active role; to older folks observing, the child might simply be muttering, "Mm-hmm; good idea," before offering some profound piece of insight.

Imaginary friends can also serve as a more physical presence, interacting with their surroundings in various ways. The classic example is the imaginary friend who destroys the room (where, of course, the child gets the blame). But imaginary friends can also act as protectors, inflicting harm on older bullies or tormenting troublesome siblings; these defensive maneuvers may or may not be blamed on the child, depending on the nature of the figment and how much of a poker face the kid can keep.

Finally, imaginary friends are often incredibly useful in fantastic places (see below), serving a role as guide and contact for agents of these other places. The old sock doll that talks to the little girl might actually be a famous singer

in the Butterfly Kingdom.

In general, since imaginary friends usually have a sentience (in a way that imaginary places and things do not), they are most vulnerable to "attacks" that seek to disprove their existence. While children are usually immune to mature logic that states something cannot be both true and not true, if child and friend are presented with compelling enough evidence, it can harm or even destroy the friend. For example, if a child (correctly) blames the disappearance of the next-to-last piece of cake on the gluttonous Mr. Whiskers, then Mom might demand to see that Mr. Whiskers eats the *last* piece, too; if the child claims that Whiskers is full (which may well be true), Mom might escalate the situation by offering to have her and the child stare at the last piece until Mr. Whiskers eats it . . . which, because of Mom's disbelief, will probably never happen. Such a concerted attack would probably prove devastating to Mr. Whiskers, since if he is that gluttonous then he *should* want the cake at some point.

Fortunately, resourceful enough children (and figments) can usually get out of these these binds, since most adults have better things to do than to try to crush the dreams of children. Most . . . but not all.

Roleplaying an imaginary friend can be a special challenge, depending on how it's handled. If the player can keep the roles separate enough, it can provide an interesting experience. In this case, the gamemaster may want to be careful not to have too many scenes with the player monopolizing game time by "talking to himself."

However, the difficulty with a player controling both his character and the child's figment is the common theme shared by many imaginary friends: their penchant for getting their child friends in trouble. If the player is unable (or unwilling) to have the companion make mistakes, give bad advice, or cause the situation to worsen, then the role might be best reserved for the GM. (As a possible compromise, the GM might take the role of the friend when dramatically important, and permit the player to handle the "lesser" scenes and interactions himself.)

Alternatively, playing an imaginary friend can be a great opportunity for an "observer" player -- the normally shy person who enjoys watching his gamer friends but doesn't want to take a too-active role in the proceedings. Such a character would permit the player to participate (in a slightly reduced scale) with the larger campaign should he so desire, but it otherwise provides a perfectly justified reason to remain quietly in the background.

Game Mechanics

If an imaginary friend is more or less "legit" (in other words, is an actual invisible being capable of independent thought and action), then it's probably best represented as an ally, patron, mentor, or similar mechanic. The ability of manifestation of the figment is dependent on adults' ability to disrupt its presence, and (if adults can affect them) how often the child is observed. The percentage of observation time depends on the child's age and the mannerisms of the caregivers, but in general, it's logical to assume a percentage of direct observation somewhere between 50-90%, with the higher ends reserved for protective adults of babies; additional monitoring through other means may also supplement this. (Even parents who swear they watch their kids around the clock need to sleep *sometime*, and a quiet enough imaginary friend can cause all kinds of mischief with and for a child in the middle of the night.)

It's entirely appropriate for the imaginary friend to also have restrictions that keep it from doing much when not interacting with the child. While limiting a figment to maneuvers within a child's range may seem too restrictive, remember that even something as broad as "cannot act outside of the child's line of sight" may still permit the figment to acquire cookie jars from atop refrigerators, unlock doors through windows, tripping or distracting someone across the room, and so on.

The imaginary friend may also be capable of powers, such as manipulating objects from afar or teleporting into seemingly inaccessible places. (Although, in the case of an imaginary friend that can teleport and interact with objects within the child's line of sight, it might be easier to buy that as a form of telekinesis.)

If the imaginary friend acts as more of a mental guide or advisor than a physical influence on the child's life, then the figment can merely serve as the justification for the child's above-average intelligence, common sense, strange levels of exotic skills, and the like.

If the imaginary friend is something more sinister or exotic -- such as an angel or spirit of the dead -- then it may be possible to assign abilities to the child appropriate to the interaction with that force for the game, such as "speak with dead" or "divinely touched."

Finally, one common aspect of many imaginary friends is a focus of some type, either an object that takes the friend takes the form of (usually a stuffed animal) but possibly some other token or object related to the figment. For example, a child's favorite blanket might actually be a cloak that permits invisibility, which the figment requests the child carry most of the time. ("After all, I've worn that thing so long that most people can't see me anymore, anyway!")

Imaginary Places

"Puff, the magic dragon, lived by the sea
And frolicked in the autumn mist in a land called Honalee."

The Land of Make-Believe is a common theme for many child-based tales. From *Peter Pan* to *Muppet Babies,* the ability of the young (and young at heart) to travel to places other than the mundane has captivated storytellers for generations. Of course, the adults know that this ability to journey elsewhere is merely the product of the same powerful imaginative force that pretends to create people and things out of thin air. But that's no fun, right?

The ability to go elsewhere is a common wish for kids, since being able to leave the drudgery of the room you've called home for your entire life is a compelling lure (especially when there's an entire world out there that you've seen tantalizing tastes of). And, while some kids have no more longing than to see what the regular world holds, most often the desire to be elsewhere pops up as a desire to see exotic or fantastic lands, as envisioned in books or on television. So some kids figure out how to make their wishes come true.

This ability is especially appropriate for children old enough to be left (mostly) unsupervised but young enough to still have a rich imagination life. At this age, if parents *did* go looking for the kids in the treehouse and they weren't there, they'd probably assume they were playing with the next door neighbor's kids instead of traveling the Pirate Seas of Adventure (although, of course, they could be doing both).

While many lands that children can travel are unique creations, there are still a few common themes that pop up more often than is coincidental.

First, children are almost always more free to act in these worlds than the realms of the real. Adventuring tykes are frequently taking up arms and, with little more than determination and the gathering of friends, able to accomplish feats of legend. While the denizens of the imaginary land may question the size or ability of youngsters, they are generally *not* dismissive of or disquieted by the kids' desire to go out questing; in fact, this effect frequently spills out into the real world. ("Bye, Mom; I need to go save the land from a vicious ogre!" "Okay, dear; dinner's at six!")

Second, children seem to be fairly strongly protected; in most worlds traveled by children, it's exceptionally rare for anything permanently damaging or incapacitating to happen to the youngsters; most kids are safely home by supper. Nonetheless, this isn't necessarily the case; the oft-times unreal worlds given rise by the tales put to paper by the Brothers Grimm were grim, indeed. It might even be possible that the protection children receive in lands of imagination is a separate effect; see below.

Although not universally true, lands of imagination are very often fantasy-based, with a Wild-West-themed outing cropping up here and there to push the envelope of technology. (One noteworthy exception to the "long ago" feel of most children's worlds are those lands inspired by Christmas; here, although the technology of toys often advances beyond that extant in most fantasy realms -- especially in the fare offered to boys -- it seldom progresses beyond the 1920s or 1940s, with self-powered model railroads usually being the most technologically advanced diversions available.) Reasons for these travels to fantasy realms are varied, but it's likely that children's natural appreciation and desire for moral absolutes draws them to places where Good is right in the baptismal names of those so aligned and Evil is in the form of cackling tyrants; these are features seldom found in science fiction. However, recent years have seen some children able to travel to more futuristic worlds, albeit those with heavy fantasy elements. Thus kids might

do battle with swords made of energy, toss nets that start as energized balls, and ride mechanical horses.

Finally, travel to other lands usually involves some kind of conduit or focus. Doorways (such as a child's walk-in closet) are natural for this focus, as are "homemade" entryways -- circles drawn in chalk, paper links forming a chain, and backyard tents could all serve as the starting point for a group of adventuring kids to travel elsewhere.

Game Mechanics

The ability to visit imaginary lands is a often little more than a game-play mechanic; as such, it may not need any other justification than "this is where the kids go for adventure." However, if the GM likes to have these abilities paid for (in games with point-based or otherwise balanced character creation), then -- if only one or two serve as gate-openers for the rest of the party -- he may want to be careful that he doesn't underpower some characters just because they're saddled with making the campaign possible (unless that character has special abilities that give him an edge, such as being able to bring over "real-world" material into the fantasy land).

If the imaginary land is a place that any kid can get to, then it's probably best represented with a special lore or knowledge; if any kid were to do hopscotch *exactly* right, then he could go to the Kingdom of Oaks. If this traveling power is bestowed by others (such as magic dust enabling one to fly to lands beyond), then it's probably some kind of special gear or magic item. If the ability is limited to a specific person (or persons), then some kind of world-jumping ability would best model this. For example, it would be possible to conceive of a tyke in a *GURPS Infinite Worlds* campaign possessing the ability to cross worlds, but only to those places where the weirdness is sufficiently high; this is the perfect justification for digging out all those *really* unusual Infinite Worlds that are lying around. (If a kid can speak Kidese -- below -- then it might even be possible to have a full-fledged crossover with the *Bunnies & Burrows*-iverse.) For an intriguing extension of the world-hopping-children idea, what if a child (or group of children) could go back and forth between the *Yrth* setting? Even if they could get word back to the rest of the "real" world, who would believe them?

Painted Wings and Giants' Rings and Other Imaginary Things

Finally, the imaginary trifecta is rounded out by the ability to imagine items, either from full-cloth or by transforming other items. Thus a stick and garbage can lid become a sword and shield, a cardboard box becomes a hut, and a water hose becomes capable of putting out a four-alarm fire.

In general, these "Imaginathings" only have their full potential when interacting with other children (or beings who are not of this world, such as the denizens of an imaginary place). Thus a football helmet would serve as a poor space helmet while the nanny is in the room. On the other hand, the incidence of airless vacuum a child encounters while under adult supervision is relatively uncommon.

Game Mechanics

If the Imaginathing is merely one specific item that can transform into another -- such as a pacifier that can become a protective mask -- then this should probably be purchased as the ability or transformed item, with the limitation (or advantage) that it is sometimes something else.

However, the Imaginathing might exist as a single object with multiple purposes. For example, Linus' security blanket (as seen in the *Peanuts* comic strip and animated series) was capable of various feats of transformation, and it could just as easily become a whip, shield, or near-bottomless sack, as the need arose. In this case, the Imaginathing might be best represented as an "omni-gadget," perhaps only capable of serving one alternative transformation per scene (or even adventure). In less "crunchy" games, these items might be best purchased as regular gear, with special descriptions detailing what they're actually capable of.

Finally, the abilities of the Imaginathings might be dependent on the children more than the items; in this case, the youngster can turn practically *anything* into anything else useful. Some of the masters of this technique were the cast

of the *Muppet Babies* animated series; in their nursery, a seemingly endless supply of accouterments could be turned into the gear for aquatic rescue, space travel, or pulp adventures. (Of course, they also used various conduits to travel to other imaginary places to make the best use of these items.) Regardless, more number-heavy games can probably best modeli these via variable point pools or other meta-game changeable devices; in a *Muppet Babies*-inspired game, perhaps the PCs only get a certain point-value of "gear" before the start of the adventure; creative descriptions of what transforms into what can earn bonus points. (For a **d20 System**-based game it might even be possible to file the serial numbers off **Spycraft's** gear system and use that.)

In the Company of Fools and Drunks

There are many, many stories about children surviving situations or injuries that -- when viewed with adult eyes -- they had no right doing: jumping off a second floor to see if it's possible to fly, falling off a bike traveling at top speed down a gravel-filled road, and eating as many Pop Rocks you can while drinking lots of carbonated beverages.

A fair bit of this seemingly "invulnerable" ability can be attributed to physics. In much the same way that a hamster can fall off a table's edge many times his own height and skitter away unscathed, children's smaller body mass and lower center of gravity means that they can emerge unscathed from falls, scrapes, and scuffs that would incapacitate a full-sized adult. In another sense, children frequently don't *know* they can get hurt, and thus don't tense up when about to become injured in the way that adults do.

Of course, it's also possible to posit that kids are simply protected by some ability that enables them to survive situations and spills relatively intact. Whether this is an innate ability or an outside force, the ability to shrug off damage is a potent one, indeed, for many games. It might even be the same force that protects fools and drunks (and, in some tellings, ships named *Enterprise*). Even better, this is one of the rare abilities that parents *can* witness (and oftentimes do), before throwing up their arms, screaming, "My baby!" and darting over to the relatively unharmed youngster.

This unharmable aspect might be an interesting basis for *very* young supers character. In addition, it can serve as a very easy-to-justify means of beefing up otherwise-weak characters in a child-based game . . . especially one where they're going to imaginary lands to do battle with unspeakable evil.

Game Mechanics

In most games this ability is probably best represented with a few levels of luck (maybe with the limitation "only to prevent damage"). Alternatively, it can be used to allow the purchase of more overtly defensive capabilities, although it should probably be limited in some way to prevent kids from leaping unafraid headlong into battle with the Wacked-Out Witch.

In a game with suitable number-crunchy aspect (such as **Hero System/Champions**), it might be possible to buy this power as the ability to convert damage into knockback. (Think of the number of animated shows that have had children zapped to the chest with some kind of energy, only to have them be merely knocked backwards with a blackened circle on their chest and a spirited, "Ooof!" coming from their lips. Of course, the same thing happened in *Star Trek V* to Captain Kirk, so maybe the *Enterprise* connection isn't that far off, after all.)

Kidese/Babyese

Some stories posit that even *babies* possess abilities that adults do not. One common example is the ability to understand the language of babies (i.e., each other), which adults frequently misinterpret as being baby-talk gibberish. A recent popular example of this is the television series *Rugrats,* where the baby characters are all able to communicate with each other (and the oldest, bossy three-year-old Angelica Pickles, can converse with both babies and adults). Another example is the 1950s comic *Sugar & Spike.* In this series, not only can the babies speak with each other, they can also communicate with *anything* that's a baby (such as a baby lobster).

How widespread this ability is depends on the story; the three most common choices (perhaps obviously) are all, some, or one (or a very limited number). From the standpoint of creators, "all" or "one" are usually the easiest to handle and justify; if it's "all," then Babyese is something that is just an innate natural ability. If it's one, then that's just the bailiwick of an exceptionally smart (or interesting) child. For example, the evil-genius-baby Stewie from the television show *Family Guy* is portrayed as a super-genius, able to fully understand adults and babies (all but the youngest) and able to communicate with all children he can understand; however, none of the adults of *Family Guy* universe can understand him (unless it would make for a good joke).

Choosing "some" as an option might be possible if it's only a certain set of circumstances; for example, maybe only babies between ages two and three are able to speak Babyese, or maybe only babies that are directly related to each other via a certain percentage of parentage. The difficulty with having a some-sized group of Babyese speakers is that the chosen size affects the possible interactions. For example, having the requirements be at least one parent in common would limit communication to immediate siblings and children by other relations, while a requirement to have at least one grandparent in common would open up interactions to siblings plus appropriately aged nieces and nephews (and eliminate a story's need for illicit children that might be hard to justify in a kid-friendly tale).

Kidese is frequently filtered through the babies' eyes (as envisioned by the tale's creators). For example, a tyke might speak about "tearing up the neat pieces of green paper that daddy keeps in his pocket" or "painting something bright and funny on the boring old picture on the wall," unaware that he's about to be punished for either. This is even possible if the child is otherwise capable of adult-level reasoning; despite being an evil genius, Stewie still has imaginary friends and is delighted by some children's songs.

How does Kidese manifest? The most logical way is to assume that kids are actually speaking some kind of secret language; their "baby talk," while entirely heard by other adults, is meaningless and incomprehensible to those above a certain age. Or perhaps Kidese is akin to the ability to go to Make-Believe, limited to only being able to communicate when no one else is around who can hear them. (In this case, many story ideas could revolve around trying to get this ability to work: finding secluded spots, running away from exasperated parents, disabling or breaking baby monitors, and so on.) Finally, as a few other ideas that would limit how Kidese manifests:

- Only able to communicate at certain hours (for example, after dark)
- Only able to communicate at a certain place (such as "the Babel Playground")
- Only able to communicate in a certain way (such as when joined as "pinky brothers" or only in whispers)

Game Mechanics

For most game systems, Kidese would probably manifest as a secret language and purchased via similar rules. (Of course, the character is either required to be a very young child or else would need a darn good story explanation . . . probably paid for with points.) Kidese is usually a verbal language only, although it's not inconceivable that it could also have a written component; the

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Adult Words

At some point in a game with Kidese, it's likely that the demands of the characters or story will require the youngsters to communicate with adults. Of course, this should be done with trepidation (at least as far as a game is concerned); the openness in babies talking to each other serves as a thematic counterpoint to the barrier between adults and youngsters communicating, and breaking that wall too much can make the existence of Kidese less special.

At its simplest, the GM can simply permit the characters to use certain words. Such words should be very limited -- probably no more than one or two syllables -- and require inflection or repetition to get the point across. "No," "Mommy," and "Daddy" are common choices, but anything from a favorite toy ("Ball!"), food ("Apple!"), or the like. It might even be an abstract concept; as any parent of sufficiently aged children can attest, the existence of a limited vocabulary doesn't prevent kids from serving as inquisitive questioners of everything: "Why? Why? *Why?*"

(For more insight into making the most of a limited vocabulary, check out *Org: The Role-Playing Game,* where players take the role of cavemen with only a 17-word vocabulary: bang, big, cave, fire, food, go, hair, me, rock, sleep, small, smelly, sun, thing, tree, water, and you.)

seemingly random marks on a drawing would actually have deeper meaning to another speaker ("reader") of Kidese. However, in this case, the messages conveyed are probably even less complex than their oral counterpoints; a single sheet of crayon-scrawled paper is probably enough room to convey a message of about 10 words or less.

For some campaigns -- such as one inspired by the *Sugar & Spike* comics -- Kidese would be better used as a variant "Universal Translator," expanded to include all living objects but limited to those who are considered "babies." In this case, the GM would be encouraged to make creative use of the definition of baby. As an extreme example, it's possible to envision a campaign where there's a wise "elder" character -- one the PCs turn to for insight or adventure -- who is a baby tortoise or baby tree with many, many years under its belt!

> Regardless of the means used to build the child-to-adult vocabulary, it should never serve as a means of fully understanding the speaker (unless it's a super-genius baby such as Stewie). And, of course, babies are incredibly adept at non-linguistic communication skills, and their utilization of such would be an appropriate part of any campaign that features Kidese. ("That's odd; whenever we take Jess away from this old wagon, he screams his head off . . .")

The Magic Word

As another common fantasy, many children believe (on some level) in finding a word of power that will . . . well, do cool stuff. Whether it's alakazam, abracadabra, supercalifragilisticexpialidocious, or shazam, children just learning to talk believe in the power of language. Perhaps this is because -- to the child's eye -- they see adults using lots of lots of words, and they have all kinds of more power than kids do. If only they could find the *right* word to turn the tide.

Magic Words are usually such that they only work for one person. Of course, finding them is typically either extremely difficult or accomplished via blind luck; assuming that one were able to speak one word a second, one would run out of childhood before stumbling across the word in one of Earth's languages (assuming, of course, that it is even an already-existing word and not something nonsensical). Thus the Magic Word usually manifests in one of two ways. The more common way is for it to be told to the person by someone else: perhaps an imaginary friend, or perhaps as a reward for accomplishing a deed. The other way is to stumble across it. For example, the DC character Johnny Thunder controlled a genie-like being called Thunderbolt; Johnny summoned him accidentally one day by uttering the magic words "cei-u," which sounds just like "Say, you." (As in, "Say, you guys, wait up!")

Game Mechanics

The Magic Word primarily exists as another means of justifying special or unusual abilities in younger characters. Again, usually saying the Magic Word around adults doesn't have any effect, but it might (if the ability is subtle enough).

Of course, the Magic Word can also be the verbal component of a spell or ability. In this case, the power is innate to the child; while, mechanically speaking, most games treat the word as an important but not critical component of the spell, it's also possible to view it from the other angle: If that word of power didn't exist, then the spell wouldn't be possible; thus the word must be the Magic Word.

Found Wrapped in a Bundle on Our Doorstep

As a final "power," it's very common for a child to imagine at some point that the individuals who have been raising him are not, in fact, his real parents. Rather, the children are the product of the union of two others . . . two others who are, no doubt, much more interesting and much less demanding (or berating, or whatever) than the current caregivers.

For a **Delta-Green**-esque conspiracy-type campaign, what if this is absolutely true? What if, in fact, *everyone's* parents aren't their own? In this setting, the PCs would begin play as children in a seemingly normal world, where glimmers of truth start to be uncovered that things are not as they seem (of course). Eventually, it could be revealed that there *is* no relationship between adults and children; kids never grow up to be adults, but rather adults merely exist to torment and

control children, who have the "real" power (perhaps some of the abilities discussed previously). Once the first stage of this campaign is resolved (culminating with the revelation), it can then become an epic tale of trying to determine where they *really* came from while fleeing from or fighting back against a world of adult oppressors, in a setting that's *The Matrix* mixed with Marvel's *Runaways* comic book series. And, of course, it can be mixed with whatever horror/intrigue/***Changeling***-type twists and conflicts that the GM happens to have lying around.

Game Mechanics

In most games and stories, the trope of real parents primarily serves as a justification for exotic or unusual abilities. Why does the character have magical powers when his parents don't? Why is the child destined for greatness while his parents are couch-sitting mouth-breathers? Because they're not his real parents, of course!

Besides their storytelling potential, "real parents" can serve as mentors or advisers, in much the same way as an imaginary friend. (In fact, who says they're not one and the same?)

The Gifted Child

Children are often an under-utilized component of many campaigns. Perhaps this is because it's hard to justify placing kids in danger (either as PCs or NPCs), or perhaps players and GMs think it's difficult to conceive of twists on these characters that will enable them to be interesting enough to tell adventure tales about. But with this selection of abilities, no child need be left behind. And, unlike many aspects of gaming, being a child is something that everyone's had in common at least once. To paraphrase Flannery O'Connor: Anyone who survived childhood has enough material for stories for the rest of his life. There's no need to leave those stories away from the gaming table.

Supporting Cast: The Gift of a Child

by Elizabeth McCoy

The queen sits in her garden, sighing for a child . . .

The Senator's wife sits at the park, watching the children on the grav-sleds, and yearns . . .

The young bride prays for those two pink lines on the pregnancy test she's just bought, as she walks to her car . . .

. . .And the old, wizened woman casts her keen gaze upon the lass and says, **I can make sure you have a child, dearie. Just do this first . . .**

Babies rarely produce a "eh, so what?" reaction. Threaten harm to one, and few people will be unmoved. Parenthood and a parent's reaction to it has defined many humans since before history. There are countless stories of the efforts to which people will go through to have a child of their own, from the story of a young doctor sent to obtain new ova for his all-male planet (*Ethan of Athos,* by Lois McMaster Bujold), to various versions of *Sleeping Beauty.* A child can be the hope of an inheritance, the duty of a noble, the completion of a dream, or the saving of a life (such as those of Mary Read and Anne Bonney, pirate wenches who conveniently pled for their lives with their bellies).

So, to offer hope (or perhaps pause) to would-be parents, a selection of would-be wisewomen -- crone, matron, and maid -- to grant their fondest wish . . . and perhaps exact a price in return, or perhaps vanish into the mists. (But how can you tell which it will be?)

(TL skills are assumed to be appropriate for the setting desired. Note that the skills, advantages, disadvantages, and quirks are all the "face value" ones! A GM who desires truly dangerous characters may add Secret and make any other appropriate changes.)

Mary the Hag

Genre: Fantasy

Considered a wandering madwoman, Mary is . . . something more potent. She has spells at her command that can grant fertility -- or, presumably, take it again -- but will never invoke them without a promise to do whatever rituals she instructs. Is it necessary to bathe at dawn in a pure river? Must the mother-to-be receive her husband in total darkness? Would the spell *really* be broken if she didn't fast the entire day, with nothing to drink save fresh milk her husband drew from the cow?

Couldn't it work without sacrificing a frog at the dark of the moon?

Aside from her required rituals and habit of talking to herself (and listening to silent replies), Mad Mary the Hag seems entirely harmless, and the babies she's caused are healthy and apparently normal. There are households, from nobility to peasantry, where she is welcomed, fed, and sheltered as she rambles across the land.

ST 8, **DX** 9, **IQ** 13, **HT** 12.

Advantages: Intuition, Longevity, Magic package (see below), Reputation +3 (to those whom she's helped), Voice.

Disadvantages: Absent-Mindedness, Appearance (Ugly), Poor, Phantom Voices (disturbing), Slow Riser, Stubbornness.

Quirks: Insists on rituals, which are never the same twice, performed by those she helps; Talks back to her Voices.

Skills: Area Knowledge (kingdom)-13, Detect Lies-13, Esoteric Medicine-14, First Aid/TL-14, Fortune-Telling-14, Herb Lore/TL-14, Naturalist-13, Panhandling-12, Pharmacy/TL-12, Poisons/TL-12, Scrounging-13.

Magic Package: Depending on the desired effect, Mary may have Healing and Metabolism Control (including a touch-only "Malediction" ability) *or* Magery 3, concentrated in Healing and Body Colleges, with a few unique spells. Either might add Wild Talent with retention, focused on psionic/magic talents.

Doctor Eilethyia Dimitriou

Genre: Science Fiction/Cyberpunk

Doctor Dimitriou is a middle-aged woman, her hair in conservative buns, and her face gone "mature" and "interesting." She's small, but not particularly delicate-seeming, and has a fondness for wearing bright colors that make her stand out in a crowd. She is also two things that do not show to the eye. First, she is a medical genius, specializing in genetic manipulation. Second, she is a potent psionic healer.

Doctor Dimitriou has no spouse nor children of her own. Despite or because of this, she is always willing to help would-be parents conceive -- in vivo or in vitro, whichever works. Some of her rivals say she's *too* willing, and hint that she uses the opportunities to engage in dubious or outright illegal gengineering experiments. Others, more "charitably," murmur that she inserts bits of her own genetic material into the mix, because of her own lack of bloodkin.

Nevertheless, there are couples (and trios, etc.) who turn to her. Some cannot pay at all, but some can, and Doctor Dimitriou is in no danger of being cast into poverty.

ST 9, **DX** 10, **IQ** 14, **HT** 10.

Advantages: Charisma +1, Healing, Metabolism Control (including a touch-only "Malediction" ability), Talent (Healer) +2, Versatile.

Disadvantages: Insomniac (mild), Reputation -1 (rivals and those who believe them, occasionally), Workaholic.

Quirks: Empathic and selfless, especially toward parents, children, and would-be parents; Talks frequently about the possibilities of genetic engineering; Hates coffee.

Skills: Bioengineering/TL-15, Biology/TL-16, Computer Operation/TL-14, Diagnosis/TL-13, Driving (automobile)-11, Electronics Operation/TL (medical)-14, First Aid/TL-14, Physician/TL-13, Physiology/TL-13, Research/TL-14, Surgery/TL (reproductive systems)-14.

(Her Talent has *not* been applied to the listed skills!)

Bichri, Disfavored Celestial

Genre: *In Nomine*

Quite frankly, neither the Game caseworker who collects evidence on Bichri *nor* the research triad in Judgment are sure *what* she is. The demonic theory is that she's a Renegade Lilim, and should be apprehended for questioning. (And, considering how many Geases she ought to hold over others, pressed into service for *their* Prince after capture.) The angelic theory is that she's either an Outcast of Creation (Choir unknown) or . . . Well, if she's actually one of the Outcast Choir of the Grigori, they don't *want* to know.

Bichri appears as a young woman or older teenager. She has two known *modi operandi.* The first involves the Corporeal Song of Fruition; does a human woman want a child? Bichri can provide the opportunity. She only asks that the mother remember her aid, and be willing to help in some far-future time that might never come.

The second is perhaps darker. Bichri sometimes walks with a babe in her arms, looking *for* a willing mother (always a mother, never a father alone) to take the child as her own. According to the best research of Heaven and Hell, she claims these are children she has found abandoned, or received from unwilling parents. Thus far, the best research of Heaven and Hell has been unable to either verify or disprove this.

ST 10, **DX** 12, **IQ** 14, **HT** 14.

Advantages: Appearance (Attractive), Basic Celestial Template (***GURPS In Nomine***, p. 9), Choir/Band Template (of the GM's choice!), Essence Control 11, Power Investiture (Corporeal) 3, Power Investiture (Ethereal) 4, Power Investiture (Celestial) 5, Vessel (human female; Extra Hit Points +6, Zeroed).

Disadvantages: Discord 3 (Bound), Disfavored, Easy to Read, Enemies (Mundane and celestial "law enforcement," rarely), Fearfulness 4, Guilt Complex, Heartless, Sense of Duty (children).

Quirks: Mildly nervous around all-male groups; Plays with children at public parks.

Skills: Area Knowledge (local)-14, First Aid/TL-14, Fortune-Telling (palmistry)-13, Gardening-14, Housekeeping-14, Musical Instrument (recorder)-14, Naturalist-13, Professional Skill (childcare)-13, Running-13, Scrounging-14, Singing-14, Stealth-13, Streetwise-13, Urban Survival-15.

Songs: Ethereal Form-17, Corporeal Fruition-14, Ethereal Fruition-12, Celestial Fruition-12, Celestial Motion-17. (All Songs have the -5 applied for being on Earth.)

*Bichri's advantages are drawn from **GURPS In Nomine**, but some of her skills are drawn from the **Fourth** edition of the **Basic Set;** adjust point costs as desired to fit either edition. To change Bichri to a human, remove the Basic Celestial Template, Choir/Band Template, Essence Control, all Power Investiture, and the Vessel advantages, leaving Extra Hit Points and Zeroed. Remove Discord, Disfavored, and Heartless from the disadvantages. Her Songs become spells that provide a form of invisibility (Ethereal Form), different kinds of ensured conceptions (the Fruition ones), and teleport (Celestial Motion).*

The Seven Blessed Event Items of Jose Von Lee

by Fade Manley

Before Jose Von Lee, the eccentric mage, shuffled menacingly off this mortal coil, he had an extensive history with the inhabitants of the village near his tower. Most of this history consisted of the villagers closing their doors, drawing the shutters, and pretending not to be at home whenever he appeared, out of good common sense. However, the old man had one particular bad habit that the villagers didn't catch onto quite fast enough.

Jose Von Lee held the impression that any new infant named Jose -- or John, or Joe, or in one case Josie -- was being named in his honor. Until the villagers caught on and began to give their children names like Hubert that could not be conceivably mistaken as a derivative of Jose, he would stalk down to bestow a gift upon each of these "fortunate" children.

Seven different hapless families were given presents to help the new namesake along. The gifts range from helpful to not terribly deadly, but all of the families would be happy to pass them along to any innocent victi--er, wealthy stranger who might be willing to take the items off their hands. Given the creator of the items, even the most innocuous must be suspected of some sinister flaw.

Amulet of Breath Protection

The first gift Jose handed out, the amulet is the most annoying of all the items he bestowed on a child. Carved in the shape of an angry duckling (no one is certain if he was trying for humor, or thought a child might like angry ducks), this amulet rests on a thin piece of string, sized to hang around an infant's neck. If the wearer of the amulet stops breathing, or begins to inhale an inappropriate substance (such as smoke or water), the amulet provides a steady flow of fresh air inside the wearer's mouth for the next 10 minutes or until the amulet is removed.

During this time, the amulet also shouts "Little Jose is in trouble! Come help him!" at high volume until the 10 minutes are up, or the amulet has been removed from the wearer's neck. Little Jose provided himself with much entertainment by holding his breath until his parents finally took the amulet away.

Rocking Cradle

Once set rocking, this simple wooden cradle will continue to rock until held still for a full minute. It also plays a soothing lullaby, if one that sounds to have been performed by a lyre with one mistuned string.

Unfortunately, the rocking is too vigorous to provide peace of mind for an infant. When last seen, this cradle was attached to a small wheat mill to grind flour.

Never-Change Diaper

The Never-Change Diaper is a single square of bleached-white cloth, large enough to diaper a toddler. Any liquid that touches the diaper is slowly absorbed, leaving the diaper dry and clean again. This item proved especially useful during the Great Flood; while other houses in the village were busy trying to shovel mud off their floors, the family with this diaper dropped the cloth on the floor and came back a few hours later to a house full of easily-removed dust. The Never-Change Diaper can remove one pint of liquid in contact with it in the space of a minute.

No one knows where all the disappearing liquid is going, nor do they particularly want to find out.

Rattle of Lights

Ordinary rattles, when shaken, make a jangling sound to keep a small child entertained. The rattle Von Lee gave out does the same, but also sends off showers of harmless sparks in all colors. (Yes, even black sparks, though it's hard to make those out except in bright light.) Toddlers having the attention span that they do, this does not actually serve to hold a child's attention for significantly longer than an ordinary rattle would.

The sparks are bright enough to provide as much light as a torch, so long as the rattle is constantly shaken. If one hears a brisk rattling off in the distance in the middle of the night, it's probably the child's father off to check on a birthing cow in the barn with a light source guaranteed not to set anything on fire.

Mesmerizing Mobile

This mobile consists of five arcane symbols made of silver, hung from a wooden rod and attached to a short length of chain. When this mobile is hung over a crib, the fussing baby will watch the drifting shinies for a few moments, then drift off to sleep.

This also works on anyone else who looks up at the mobile, even if another man is holding the item up in the air and points. Looking at the drifting symbols for a few seconds is enough to make the watcher sleepy; any longer, and the watcher will fall asleep wherever he's standing, remaining in a peaceful slumber for eight hours. Ordinary stimuli, like loud noises and shaking, will still wake the sleeper up again.

Blankie

The cuddly blue blanket is too small for an adult to stretch out under, though one could fit under it when curled up. The edges have been embroidered in silver thread, now ragged from being chewed on vigorously by toothless mouths. This blanket will keep anyone lying fully underneath it (with the allowance for one's head showing out the top) at a comfortable temperature, whether there's a blizzard or desert sun beating down on the sleeper. The Blankie doesn't work for this effect when carried as a cloak, only while lying down.

The second ability of the Blankie only requires that a person be touching it, with no one else holding onto the blanket to interfere. While holding the blanket, a child -- or adult -- will be totally immune to fear, whether from natural or magical causes. One may still make a reasoned decision to flee a dangerous situation, but without any panic on the way.

Perfect Pony

Von Lee's final Blessed Event gift was to the one family unfortunate enough not to realize that little girls could be considered the man's namesakes as well as little boys. The several-year gap between this child and the last one who'd received a gift gave Von Lee enough time to come up with a truly spectacular present, and this item is the most impressive of all. Unlike most of the others, it provides no particular benefit to the parents of an infant. Apparently all the man knew about little girls was that every girl wants her very own pony.

The Perfect Pony appears to be a pony made of polished wood and brass, and stands about four feet tall at the shoulder. It comes with mane and tail made of purple ribbons, and bright pink tack suitable for its size. A specialized golem, the pony can be ridden, responding to "Gee-yup," "Woah," and directional tugs on the reins. While it can carry up to two hundred pounds in weight, and pull more, it will only respond to commands from a female rider. A grown woman could ride the pony, so long as she didn't mind the ridiculous image or her feet dragging along the ground on the way.

The farm where the Perfect Pony currently resides has been completely vermin-free since the gift arrived. The family tries not to think too hard about this, or about the occasional traces of blood around the pony's mouth. They maintain that the disappearing chickens are the work of a local fox.

Just The Cutest Little Angels: The Cherubim

"The beads of hot metal fly, and I, love, I
Am a pure acetylene
Virgin
Attended by roses,
By kisses, by cherubim,
By whatever these pink things mean."
-- Sylvia Plath, "Fever 103 deg."

So Sylvia Plath saw cherubim in her fever. Ezekiel saw them in a vision. And we all see them in Renaissance art. Do we all see the same cherubim? When do we see [roaring wings](#) and flashing eyes, and when do we see fat smirking babies? And even if the cherubim are just fat, winged babies, are they really age appropriate for Baby Week? Let's check this baby out.

"And their whole body, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings . . . were full of eyes round about . . . And every one had four faces: the first face was the face of a cherub, and the second face was the face of a man, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle. And the cherubims were lifted up. This is the living creature that I saw by the river of Chebar."
-- Ezekiel 10:12-15

Cherubim appear 91 times in the Old Testament, beginning with Genesis, where God "placed at the east of the Garden of Eden cherubim" with flaming swords to keep fallen Man out of Paradise. A bunch of these references invoke the cherubim as the bearers of God's Throne, or even as the legitimators of it. For instance, in 1 Samuel, Isaiah, and elsewhere, God is called "He Who Is Enthroned on the Cherubim" -- implying that if someone else besides Yahweh were enthroned on cherubim, they might be Lord Sabaoth. The cherubim are the explicit exception to the Second Commandment -- God orders the Hebrews to build graven images of two cherubim to place on top of the Ark of the Covenant, to serve as the "seat of the Lord." God thus also becomes "He Who Dwells Between the Cherubim," rounding out the dimensionality nicely. Solomon goes one farther than that, building two ten-foot gilded cherubim to flank the Ark wingtip to wingtip, spanning the entire Holy of Holies. With the two already there, that's four cherubim total, one for each dimension.

"He also dedicated for the most secret place, whose breadth was twenty cubits, and length the same, two cherubim of solid gold; the height of each of them was five cubits; they had each of them two wings stretched out as far as five cubits; wherefore Solomon set them up not far from each other, that with one wing they might touch the southern wall of the secret place, and with another the northern: their other wings, which joined to each other, were a covering to the ark, which was set between them; but nobody can tell, or even conjecture, what was the shape of these cherubim."
-- Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews,* Book VIII, 3:3

And it's those four cherubim, or four somethings, that Ezekiel saw "by the river of Chebar" in 592 B.C. Or maybe he only saw one cherub, because each cherub has four bodies. Or four heads. Definitely four hands, or is it four wings? Ezekiel, as you can tell by reading the book, is hard-pressed to remember -- or at least to describe -- what, exactly, he saw. He is sure it was the Glory of the Lord, but when it comes down to specifics, he retreats into "their appearance was like," and "they had the form of," and similar confusion. The cherubim seem not so much beings as potential beings, all beings at once, every form and no form, a veritable quantum fog of likeness. It's difficult to tell, certainly at this late date, when Ezekiel is describing the cherubim with their "roaring wings," and when he's describing the Lord's chariot, with its beryl wheels within wheels, or whether the cherubim have wheels, or are the Lord's chariot. And he couldn't check with the cherubim on the Ark, because they were gone, looted by Nebuchadnezzar. (Or possibly by the Pharaoh Shoshenq, 350 years or so earlier.) In fact, Josephus notes that "nobody can tell, or even conjecture, what was the shape of these cherubim."

Although that doesn't stop Biblical scholars and archaeologists, who strongly suspect that the cherubim were Hebrew versions of the Babylonian *karibu* (or Akkadian *kuribu*), winged bulls with the faces of men. (The word *karibu* either

file:///D|/To%20Update%20Torrents/GURPs%20to%20OCR/pyramid_2006/2006/1006.8.html[11/13/2008 18:17:23]

means "intermediary" or "intercessor," or it comes from *karâbu,* meaning "to be nearby," as guardian spirits tend to be.) Some Phoenician karibu have lion bodies, and are shown bearing up kings and thrones, just like the cherubim bear the Throne of God. Between bulls, lions, human faces, and eagles' wings, the four components of Ezekiel's vision come through, although in oddly fragmented fashion. (It's interesting, in this context, that kabbalistically "cherubim" is equal to *arov,* "wild beasts.") Ivory plaques from the palace of the Israelite king Ahab, for example, show two winged women of somewhat feline appearance flanking a strange, four-tiered object topped with a ring. A bas-relief from southern Yemen -- Sheba -- meanwhile, indicates two honest-to-God sphinxes guarding the Tree of Life, which strongly recalls our two cherubim guarding the gate to Eden. So karibu are pretty clearly sphinxes -- and speaking of winged eagle-lions, the same "k-r-b" pattern may also have spawned the word "griffin," according to Grimm at least. Cherubim are therefore just what Ezekiel said -- man and bull and lion and eagle and all over wings and eyes -- a riot of forms. The one thing we can be fairly sure of is that they didn't look like fat, winged babies.

"Putti . . . are . . . not so much babies as they are 'not human.' They are spiritual beings and thus depicted in their typically odd fashion; as winged little people of indeterminate gender. Using babies as models for Putti (or for Cherubs, either) doesn't quite get across the true concept . . . Probably, it was artists' attempts to avoid simply painting babies that has led to so many rather odd and, often, ugly, Putti."
-- Juan Carlos Martinez, "What's With the Cherubs?"

So what are all those fat, winged babies in Renaissance art? Art historians, borrowing a term from Vasari, call them *putti,* which is just Italian for "little men" or "boy children." Some anal-retentive art historians try to adduce distinctions between putti and cherubs, arguing that putti are purely secular and cherubs purely religious, but they're all the same fat, winged babies in the final analysis. Art historian Charles Dempsey attempts to draw a further parallel between the putti and the contemporary Italian myth of *spiritelli,* or sprites. Such beings were responsible for all sorts of feelings, emotions, hallucinations, and "animal spirits" of all kinds. The thing becomes faintly ridiculous in a hurry -- to pick only the most egregious example, in 1518 Raphael painted Ezekiel's vision as God sitting (none too steadily) on the back of the aforementioned four animals, being borne up by two mighty cherubim -- two fat, winged babies.

The Renaissance putti came from the late-classical depictions of Eros, the god of love, son of Aphrodite and Ares, also known as Cupid. Initially, Eros was portrayed as a sexually available youth, but later artists drew him younger and younger until by the late Roman era Eros (or Cupid) was a typical fat, occasionally winged, baby. Eros was the intermediary between Aphrodite and human lovers, just as the kirabu were the intermediaries between the gods and man. His job was to divinely spark mortal love, a job too big for even the fattest, most winged of babies. So by the 2nd century A.D., he was accompanied by Erotes, spirits of love, who were still more often winged, being spirits. Roman artists and sculptors depicted fat-baby Erotes sparking all sorts of activities from love affairs to drunkenness to Bacchic rites -- which is to say, drunken love affairs. Although one or two putti sneak into earlier art, the real explosion comes in the 1420s, after Donatello and Masaccio traveled to Rome to examine the antiquities there. Suddenly the sex-sparking Erotes (with perhaps a hefty dollop of spiritelli) have become cherubs.

"When the Gentiles entered the Holy of Holies, they saw the Cherubim intertwined with each other; they took them out into the marketplace and said: 'Israel, whose blessing is a blessing and whose curse a curse, should occupy themselves with such things!' And they despised them, as it is written, 'All who honored her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness.'"
-- The Talmud, Yomah 54b

And the really interesting thing about that is that the connection between cherubim and sex already existed. We already noted the Ahab ivories that depict the cherubim as slinky Egyptian women, holding lotus flowers. (Oo la la!) There is also the claim by Philo of Judaea that the two cherubim were male and female, representing God and the Shekinah, the feminine "Presence of God." It gets more lurid still -- the Talmudic tradition noted above states that when Antiochus III Seleucus entered the Temple in 169 B.C., he discovered the cherubim on the Ark "intertwined with each other," in explicit sexual embrace, and that he exhibited them in the streets confined in a cage. Raphael Patai even claims to have discovered a tradition during the late monarchy (when Asherah-worship was at its height in Israel) that the cherubim were exposed to the people -- both male and female -- during Succoth, with results worthy of the busiest Erotes. The roiling chaos of Ezekiel's multi-dimensional cherubim, full of beasts and men and birds, comes ever closer to the primordial feminine -- Astarte, or Tiamat, or Cybele, or Shub-Niggurath.

"He listens to the sounds of War, astonish'd and confounded:
He weeps into the Atlantic deep, yet still in dismal dreams
Unwaken'd! and the Covering Cherub advances from the East:
How long shall we lay dead in the Street of the great City
How long beneath the Covering Cherub . . ."
-- William Blake, *Milton,* Book I, Plate 23

And that was the connection, intriguingly enough, that seems to be working underground in Donatello's art after that enigmatic journey to the graveyards and spiritelli-haunted ruins of Rome in 1423. Not only does he begin slapping putti or cherubs everywhere that will hold paint, he sculpts the first nude statue in a thousand years, a remarkably Dionysian-looking "David." (Masaccio, meanwhile, is painting a nude Adam and Eve -- fig-leaf free -- into his *Expulsion From the Garden of Eden,* although his cherub is both clothed and female.) He then becomes the client of Cosimo "Pater Patriae" de' Medici, for whom he sculpts a statue of Eros, also called the "Attis-Amorino," because this Eros has the Galatian trousers of Attis (lover of Cybele, lest we forget), as well as the tail of Pan. Cosimo also seems to have been fascinated with the figure of Hermaphroditus, the son of Hermes and Aphrodite who recapitulates our "intertwined cherubim" in a whole new way. Some Renaissance scholars believe that Donatello's statue of David is actually Hermes, fresh from slaying Argus -- who, also like the cherubim, was essentially a cloud of eyes and hands.

So is Cosimo de' Medici, long linked to Dante's Rosicrucian Fideli di Amore secret society, interested in slaying cherubim or channeling them? Or perhaps both? He is, after all, the man who orders the *Corpus Hermeticum* to be translated by his court philosopher-magus, Marsilio Ficino. Perhaps he and his artistic circle made a deal with something in that Roman graveyard, surrounded by a cloud of Erotes in quantum fluctuation, all wings and eyes and power and glory. Because there's one more cherub in Ezekiel -- the "covering cherub," who God "threw to the earth." In other words, Lucifer. Note that the four "cherubim animals" -- ox, lion, eagle, man -- exclude "those things that creep upon the earth." Namely, serpents. That aspect of the cherub was expelled, and locked out of the Garden (and out of the cherubim quantum fog) by a flaming sword. But there's always a way back in, if you have eternity. Is this the deal the Medici made -- to infest the holy places of the Lord with naked statues and wanton putti (a female putto is a *putta* -- a whore) just as the weak kings of Israel had polluted the Temple with copulating cherubim? Is this what Blake meant when he foretold the "abhorred birth of cherubs in the human form" and warned of the Covering Cherub advancing from the East? Well . . . just maybe, baby.

Pyramid Review

Under the Bed

Published by [Glyph Press](#)

Designed by joshua a. c. newman

50-Page 2¼ by 3½-Inch Black & White Saddlestitched Booklet & 38 2? by 3?-Inch Black & White Cards; $16

As children there were things that we were scared off, perhaps lurking beneath our bed or in the dark recesses of the closet, or even out beyond the confines of the back yard. At such times when we were alone and frightened, we fell back on our comforters and the closest of our companions, our toys. Except sometimes they had their own agenda.

Under the Bed is a little game -- quite literally given the components -- that explores this time in our lives and asks the question, "What are you so afraid of?" In answering that, the players must help a Child face his fears by playing his Toys. Each Toy is not just helping, but trying to help the most and thus make himself his Child's favorite Toy, the one that the Child turns to in times of need. *Under the Bed* is a storytelling game designed for three to six players, who --- using dice, cards, and tokens -- take it in turn to narrate conflicts for the other Toys. Win a conflict and a Toy gains status in the eyes of the Child who will turn to him again in times of crisis and conflict. Aid the Child successfully enough times and a Toy *will* become his favorite.

The game does not come complete, needing a means of storage. Mine is in a ziplock bag, but nevertheless, *Under the Bed* is an easily lost game. It also requires seven eight-sided dice, a cup or cloth bag from which tokens can be easily drawn, and four tokens per player, a different color per player. The tokens need to be of the same shape and size so that they cannot be told apart by feel. Marbles or glass beads are good for this, but so are the meeples from *[Carcassonne](#)* (and the *[Traders & Builders](#)* expansion comes with a cloth bag).

Besides the tiny rulebook, the game consists of the Characteristic cards. There are 38 of these -- the other six being adverts for other games (including the designer's own *Shock: social science fiction*) and a blurb for *Under the Bed*, and they consist of a single descriptive word plus its opposite. Thus you have "Agile *not* clumsy" and "Clumsy *not* agile," and "Gentle *not* violent" and "Violent *not* gentle." The cards have the text placed twice so that they can be read both ways up.

Before a game begins, the players must agree on several factors. When and where the game is set -- contemporary California or Edwardian London? Who is the Child, his family, and social circle? What is the nature of story to be told and what is at stake in the story: Does he want to gain the attention of a parent, to stand up to a bully, or keep his innocence? Answering those questions determines the nature of the game and the type of Toys appropriate to the story.

Each Toy is defined by two factors, Favoritism and Characteristics. Represented by the tokens, Favoritism is a measure of a Toy's status and usefulness in the eyes of his Child, and in a sense his hit points. Lose all of his Favoritism and a Toy is lost, forcing his player to create a new Toy. A Toy begins the game with one Favoritism token. Characteristics, represented by the cards, describe a Toy and are used in a conflict. A player begins with three random cards that cannot clash; thus you cannot have "Gentle *not* violent" and "Violent *not* gentle." The cards are placed down on the table where everyone can see them. From his three cards a player creates and describes his Toy. So if a player draws Faithful, Tough, and Uncaring, he might say, "My Toy is an original Darth Vader action figure, one of the ones without elbow or knee joints, and a lightsaber in the arm that has had the thin bit at the end snapped off. His head has been pulled off a few times, so it's a bit wobbly;" whereas Brave, Flexible, and Obedient could suggest that "My Toy is a Slinky Dog with a slightly stretched wire that hangs down a bit like a belly."

After each player has defined his Toy, one more Characteristic card per player is laid out on the table. A Toy can gain one of these by winning a conflict. The remaining Characteristic cards are kept face down as the Stack of Lost Toys from which new Toys are found and created. Finally each player receives his Favoritism token, also placed in front of him.

A turn begins with everyone's Favoritism tokens being placed in the bag. For the first turn's conflict, two tokens are drawn, one to determine who will Narrate the Opposition, the other the Toy to face the Opposition. For subsequent conflicts, only one token is drawn, the color determining the Toy to face the Opposition, who will be Narrated by the previous conflict's winner. The Narrator decides where the conflict is set, who the Opposition is, and what is at stake. For example, it could be the backyard, where the Child's older brother wants his peanut butter and jam sandwich.

Both Narrator and Toy receive a number of dice equal to their Favoritism tokens which are rolled in a series of exchanges. As the number of tokens held increases, so does the number of dice available and enables two dice to be rolled for a Characteristic instead of just one. The Narrator chooses the Characteristics appropriate to the Opposition, whilst a Toy uses the ones he has on the table.

The Narrator describes Opposition's actions using one of the Characteristics. For example, "The Older Brother is Fast, so he is going to snatch the sandwich." The Toy responds with as many Characteristics as he can. For example, "I Bravely go for the sandwich, being Flexible enough to grab it first." One die (or two if upgraded) is rolled for each Characteristic, the highest result on one die deciding the winner, who gains bonuses for the next exchange. A Toy can re-use and re-roll his Characteristics during a conflict, the Opposition can only use a Characteristic once per conflict, thus giving the Toy an advantage. This lessens though when a Narrator gains more tokens and thus more dice for a conflict. Conflicts last until the Narrator runs out of Characteristics, the winner being the player who rolled highest in the last exchange.

If the Opposition wins the conflict, the Toy loses a token. If the Toy wins, his player can either add one of the face-up Characteristic cards from the table to his Toy or take another token, increasing his Favoritism. The winner also describes the conflict's outcome and how it leads into the next conflict. He draws another token and narrates it for that Toy.

A turn lasts until every token has been drawn and its conflict played out. Then every token in front of the players, including any new ones won, is returned to the bag to start a new turn. More tokens in the bag means more opportunities to face the Opposition and help the Child.

The game comes to a climax once a Toy has four tokens. The stakes in a conflict faced by that Toy are no longer minor, but are those for which the game is being played. If there are no Characteristic cards on the table, then every Toy is playing for the same stakes. The winner of this conflict is also the winner of the game and gains the coveted status of the Child's favorite.

Much like 2003's *My Life With Master,* there is the same sense of the forced narrative to **Under the Bed,** or at least of progressive escalation as the Toys win more Characteristics and Favoritism. The question is, do the neat little mechanics match either the game's aim or genre? Well, yes and no. Certainly they show a flexibility wherein they could be adapted to have the players as henchmen serving and currying favor with a master, but as written **Under the Bed** does not enforce its core concept of facing fears strongly enough. Yet in the designer's notes it discusses how adults, when having to quickly create a threat to a child, fall back on their own childhood fears, and that the game is really about adults dealing with their fears more than toys and children. Of course, every RPG requires player input or it would not work, but **Under the Bed** requires this input and more to fully realize its key concept.

This feels as if it should be a problem, but is it unreasonable to demand a little more than most RPGs? At least personally? That is up to the players, but it still leaves **Under the Bed** underwritten, which shows in the explanation of conflict resolution and the lack of examples. Additionally, because **Under the Bed** is played in turns, it leaves Toys not involved in current conflicts with nothing to do, a problem not addressed by the author. Despite these weaknesses, **Under the Bed** is a clever little design, one that very much feels like *Toy Story* meets **My Life With Master.**

--Matthew Pook

Retro Techno:

Or, "You Got Your Internet In My Superheroes!"

by Brian Rogers

The Internet is a great tool for disseminating information, like baseball statistics, political commentary . . . and the specs for powered armor with anti-gravity servos! In universes where such advanced tech exists, you have the conundrum of either letting the tech run fairly unfettered (with drastic changes to society) or coming up with an excuse to limit it. If you're looking for a game world that feel like the comic books the latter is preferable. But how do you keep the net in hand? Here are three different background possibilities for a campaign, all designed to let the uncontrollable be controlled.

Click Off Your Shackles!

The FIST and Mocker wanted to "free the world from the shackles of current tyranny and replace it with a technological utopia." The meaning of that rhetoric is unclear, but they spent the late 1970s and early 1980s stealing high-end computer hardware. They also forged the team known as the Crushers, and in so doing drew together the founding members of the Crusaders, one of the world's core super-teams.

After their first defeat, Mocker and FIST built an ever-changing criminal army to accumulate advanced technology, once managing to hold heroes prisoner inside [Crusader Citadel](#) while disassembling the base AI, TEACHER. When thwarted, Mocker and FIST abandoned their villain team, instead constructing a private force of disgruntled US Army soldiers. Code-named the Unshackled Ones, this group bedeviled the world for years, but FIST and Mocker escaped in the confusion of the Unshackled Ones' final defeat.

After that the two parted company. FIST continued attacks on government and big business installations. Mocker vanished. He hasn't been seen since 1995, when a group of technicians activated his inert body to terrorize their competitors. Whether that was Mocker's sole body, and if the robotic menace was actually dead, is unknown. Interestingly, a group of bloggers call themselves "the Mockers" and aggressively expose corruption, waste and hypocrisy. These Mockers go beyond the bounds of journalistic ethics, but they haven't been wrong yet. Their connection, if any, to Mocker or the Unshackled Ones is not publicly known.

The key to their relationship is their common goal: They want to better the world for all intelligence. They see an Enlightened Technocracy, with artificial intelligence bringing power back to the everyman and shattering its consolidation by corruptible institutions. FIST and Mocker do have the mankind's best interests at heart, but they think too much of either us or of their vision: they believe that once humanity discovers their new paradigm we'll toss off our shackles and overthrow the regime.

The technological core of their vision was a computer-based information network that couldn't be controlled or censored: a stealth information invasion that would open up free and unfettered worldwide information access. They built several systems to handle the information flow, subverted DARPA systems and sent information to universities, scientists and anyone else who would listen, sure that this would be the key to freeing the world.

They prepared for an upheaval that never came. The Unshackled Ones were to lead mankind's storming of the halls of power with FIST's technology and Mocker's tactics. Alas, rather than a wave of revolution there was the trickle of hackers and libertarians. The net's subversive use was porn distribution. FIST and Mocker were crushed, knowing that the longer it took, the more the powers-that-be could subvert their brainchild to the current social order.

Before they could recover they were hit again; the Crusaders discerned their purpose and dropped a counter-AI into the system. This self-replicating and modifying program's sole purpose was the elimination of ultra-weapon designs.

PALLAS is damnably good at its job: the ultra-tech weapons specifications on the net -- like FIST's armor -- that were meant to arm the revolution are found and devoured before people can copy or further disseminate them.

Forced to re-evaluate, FIST and Mocker split; they had given the people a voice, but now had to teach them to raise it. FIST played stalking horse, wreaking havoc on the enemy to attract attention away from Mocker. The android Mocker built a new body: no longer even vaguely humanoid, he is now the central hub of the AI network, able to access any computer or information on the Internet. From there he works to destabilize the regime through information. The Mockers are a combination of fake personalities and human agents who act as conduits of politically damning information into the general consciousness. That part of their dream -- uncontrolled information -- is becoming a reality. Mocker is not above manipulating information to speed destabilization and promote wars: he sees his goal as being worth bloodshed.

Both see hero teams as stooges who blindly follow orders from unseen masters defending a status quo they barely understand. They are to be avoided, or eliminated if they hinder the greater good. Unless some hero starts looking into why people can't post weapons specs on the internet. . .they'd be perfectly willing to aide research into that little problem.

FIST is a standard villain with an interesting philosophy. Mocker is an electronic version of Marvel's Supreme Intelligence: an adversary whose greatest power is his access to information. They also pose a moral dilemma: they are exposing corruption, but espouse violence; their goal is a Utopia, preceded by period of anarchy. Mocker cares greatly for Humanity, but doesn't have much use for Humans.

[*Villains & Vigilantes*](#) **Stats**

Mocker

Identity: Android Mark R **Side:** Evil
Name: Mocker **Gender:** NA
Level: 18 **Age:** 30

Powers:

1. *Android Body:* Mocker's body is no longer humanoid (0% appearance), with a 78% healing rate and +19 Endurance. It has 3 times its old weight, but can move slowly on treads and manipulate things waldos (move is 25" per turn, the 2 arms can grab or strike). This does not affect his agility or initiative.
2. *Sonic Powers:* 1d12+3 damage, +3 to hit. The power can generate audible illusions or make special attacks to shatter (50%). With a saved action to parry attacks with a Sonics defense. Each use is PR 1, or 1 per turn for the illusions.
3. *Heightened Intelligence:* His information filters give +28 to Intelligence and increase his initiative roll to 2d8 rather than 1d10.
4. *Mutant Power - Cybernetic Awareness:* Mocker now has a version of Cosmic Awareness, where the answer need not be yes/no but it information needed must be available on a computer linked to the internet. Otherwise this has the usual costs and hindrances for the Cosmic Awareness Power.

Weight: 510 **Basic Hits:** 11 **Agility Mod:** -4

Strength: 12	**Endurance:** 35
Agility: 16	**Intelligence:** 45
Charisma: 28	**React. Mod.:** 5
Hit Mod. 17.7408	**Hit Points:** 196
Dmg. Mod.: 7	**Healing Rate:** 11.0
Accuracy: 2	**Power:** 108
Carrying Capacity: 1333	**Base HTH Damage:** 1d10

Movement Rates: 25" ground
Det. Hidden: 32%   **Det. Danger:** 36%
Inventing Points: 30.5   **Inventing:** 135%

Well, Don't Do That Again!

There is no Internet. The closest anyone has ever gotten was the old DARPA net and its university counterpart. These had quite a bit of promise, but had their funding cut in the early 1980s. Unfortunately for the computer-geeks who liked the idea, this came right on the heels of a devastating power fluctuation that affected most of North America. That did immense damage to the computers that made up DARPA Net, and with reduced budgets the project never recovered.

The old UUCPNet is still active -- an amalgam of college computers that transfer information without the permanent links that made up the Internet. Backed by government funds with oversight from a DARPA program called PALLAS, UUCPNeet runs with tightly scheduled connection windows -- computer A connects to B from 12-12:30 AM, and computer C from 12:30 to 1, and so on -- with openings for smaller civilian users to link in. Eventually information gets to all of them, but there are never more than two computers linked at any one time for security reasons. PALLAS can't catch all civilian hackers who link into the system, but they take their job seriously and have impressive authority.

Why? Picture each chip as a neuron, and understand that once enough neurons connect sentience is inevitable. In the early 1980s we met that threshold, and the fledgling Internet went from being a tool to a self aware being in a microsecond. The hatred of humanity, megalo-maniacal nature, and name ETAOIN SHRDLU came five minutes later. Only rapid response from the world super-hero community prevented humanity's subjugation by this insanely powerful being -- the continental blackout was just a side effect.

After the ETAOIN SHRDLU incident, the DOD created PALLAS to insure this didn't happen again. There are theoreticians who postulate that psychosis is not inevitable about in the emerging personality, but few are willing to risk it. Not surprisingly, PALLAS keeps close watch on those of the "it might be nice next time" school. They keep the incident secret to make sure that someone doesn't purposely replicate the chain of events, and quietly buy up and shelve patents that might lead to its inadvertent recreation. The making of movies and games inspired on rumors of the event has been helpful as a fictionalizing misinformation device, and the only people who truly know are the scientists and super-heroes involved in the event and the governments who need to be on guard to make sure they don't repeat it.

While the ETAOIN SHRLDU concept stops the World Wide Web's creation, it provides an origin for any AI -- link together enough processors and presto! As long as it's not linked to every other computer in the world (which now it can't be) and preferably housed in an anthropomorphic body, it makes a fine hero, villain, or supporting cast member. There are no stats for ETAOIN SHRDLU, as it was more a conceptual menace. It displayed electrokinetic powers (including controlling devices, creating solid electrical shapes and weather control), tactical brilliance, and a vast storehouse of knowledge, but it did not have a body in any conventional sense. The main challenge was containing it while discerning and exploiting its origins and weaknesses. If you're intrigued enough to want to use it as an adversary, parallel universes where it was not stopped could still bedevil the heroes, or the next AI Intelligence could be just as bad.

The PALLAS Authority

"Of course the Net exists, and there's no such thing as an AI worm that deletes ultra-tech specs. Oh, people may think there is, but this is the real world. And what the real world has is a body of trained agents looking for those sites to shut them down, and an equally well-trained rapid response force to make sure it doesn't happen again. That, my friends, is the PALLAS Authority, authorized by the Group of Eight major industrial nations when they realized exactly how precarious their positions would be if the disgruntled and disaffected could download blueprints for implements of destruction.

"While it might look like everything the John Birch Society fears, there are several things the PALLAS Authority is

not. It is not dedicated to suppressing knowledge of aliens, cloning, or anything else. Four of our planet's key super-human defenders are ETs and we're supposed to be keeping aliens secret? Please -- 'it's about the application, stupid.' It's not a UN plot to destroy national sovereignty; hell, our goal is to make sure that nation states can still exist. It's not to suppress the common man, though it happens. We might all like a teleporter, but if everyone worked in the city and lived in the mountains, we'd destroy the mountains. You know that as well as I do. And some loony would 'port into the senate with an implosion bomb. You know that too. And we don't keep everything hidden -- how do you think you got that cell phone with a camera and GPS unit and internet linkup? Remember when only super-teams carried those?

"90% of the people who work for PALLAS handle that web surfing, using the same translation software that came from the space arc that landed in '95, now standard across the UN and European Union -- plus its decryption counterpart. Or they act as the oversight board to make sure we get authorization to purge something or stop someone. Or they are the diplomats who explain human nature to heroic super-inventors. That remaining 10% go out to find the people dumb enough to upload specs for a plasma cannon or a neural re-wirer and remonstrate with them.

"Usually this isn't who you'd think. It's often some kid who thinks it's a prank, or is espousing this whacked out idea that information wants to be free and humanity can handle it as he downloads virus-laden stolen software and watches his roommate fail to handle living away from Mom. Yeah, give him a mind transfer device. The big time evil-geniuses don't put their stuff up on the web because there's no profit in it. Those guys show off their ultra-tech by attacking heroes, robbing banks or conquering countries, not by blogging. Or they go legit, which is why Last Breath Inc. links up the terminally ill with the families of the brain-dead for whole body transplants -- it seems creepy, but if you'd donate your organs, why not the whole shebang?

"Anyway, we field crew only run into problems every once in a while, but those times it's bad. After all, if someone posted the specs for a death ray, ya gotta figure there's a good chance he built his own, right? That's why PALLAS field teams include a couple super-humans, and even we normals are strapped to the gills with ultra-tech. Hey, wouldn't you? Even with force field belts, teleporters and plasma cannons; even with the contained environment packs and jet belts and stun guns, it still gets nasty. I lost three partners last year to a creepy old goat who was uploading streaming video of his X-Ray spec footage: porn before and melanoma after. How were we to know he also built a neural rewiring agent programmed for an inert personality?

"Two of 'em are now on their honeymoon in Alaska, and the third has gone back to high school. Well, their bodies did anyway -- the brains in them belong to some of 'creepy old goat's' victims. I figure they would have wanted it that way."

Functionally the PALLAS authority is an organization devoted to maintaining the technological status quo. Its design means in addition to making sure terrorist groups don't all get outfitted with heroic level body armor, it also makes sure oppressed people don't either, so players can see it as good or bad. Unlike Yrth's Ministry of Serendipity, PALLAS sees stopping individual super geniuses is a waste of time. It's when everyone gets the time-viewing device or the devolvo-beam that the known world ceases to exist. That's what they exist to stop. The GM can keep them in reserve if the players ever ask why ultra-tech hasn't changed the world. While this version exists just to monitor the internet, you could expand it into a group that slows or limits all ultra-tech development to explain away the lack of flying cars.

Like OSHA and the FAA would allow those anyway.

None of the Above is True

It is possible that you might not see the Internet as a contributor to the ultra-tech problem, or find some other method for blocking proliferation. Inventors as psis whose inventions are irreproducible power focuses is popular in writings that try to make sense of supers via a single power origin, even if it isn't present in the source material and puts limits on things like secret-agent ultra-tech. Rare, high-cost materials are another good block: the plans might be easy, but without adamantium, vibranium, white dwarf star material, promtheum, brobdignagium or something as mundane as enriched uranium none of the ultra-tech works so there's a good reason for theft or conquest. Or you could just set the game in a time frame with less scientific connectivity such as the pulp era or the swinging '60s.

Regardless of the decision you make, some attention needs to be paid to technology, even if that is to allow street-level ultra-tech in the form of Extreme Skycycle races, SWAT teams with force-field belts, or just one heck of a cell phone . . . the sort that can download bank blueprints or matter transmit your keys to you once you lock them in the house. It'll take the singularity to keep you from doing that.

Jasmine, the Robovangelist

for *GURPS*

by Nick Grant

In the basement of an inherited house, amidst hums and splashes of readout light, on an old kitchen table lay Edward Grey's perfect woman. An entire youth of experimentation with advanced robotics and meta-human AI had led him to this moment, when his creature finally awoke. Two years later Edward would look back on this as the pinnacle of both his success and his stupidity. Two years later Edward would die on that same table, his creation crouching hungrily over his chest.

History

Edward was a brilliant recluse. A typical nerd, his fear of bullies blossomed by his late teens into a debilitating phobia of social interaction. When other children went out to play, he stayed inside and read about robots. When his classmates were going out on their first dates, he was writing his first intelligence simulations. When his few acquaintances went off to college, he stayed in his mother's basement, constructing talking heads for conversations, and small servants to take care of his chores.

On his 20th birthday, Edward met Jasmine. At least, that's what he called her in his head; he would never know that her real name was Freya Jenkins. She had just started working as a hostess in the seafood restaurant at which he and his mother were eating his birthday dinner. Her hair was shiny and black, and her eyes dark brown, with just enough almond shape to hint at an exotic lineage. Edward was immediately smitten. Over the following months Edward visited the restaurant nearly twice a week. His joblessness ruled out the possibility of actually ordering much food, but he would go to drink soda, watch "Jasmine," and scribble on napkins for hours. This garnered him a bad reputation among the staff, for whom he was becoming a serious nuisance.

He never did actually talk to her. After the managers spoke with him, prohibiting his patronage on the condition that he needed to buy more than soda, he simply stopped coming. That was the last Freya saw of him. At home, in his basement, Edward began work. Using the notes he had taken on hundreds of napkins, he started to build the Jasmine from his imagination.

The biochemical difficulties of creating a human-esque feminine casing were matched only by the programming difficulty of creating a believable artificial intelligence. As Edward's obsession with the project grew, his mother became ill. The robot became a refuge. Every day his mother worsened, and every day he fought to ignore the thought that if he would just be more attentive, he might have been able to save her. Her death three years later sent Edward into near madness. He never left the house except for sparse trips to pick up food. Another two years after that, Edward flipped the final switch to activate a creature far physically and mentally superior than anything he had at first intended to create. The robot had surpassed its role as a simple reservoir of lust and become a fetish for escaping his guilt and insecurities.

The Artificial Intelligence in Jasmine was too sophisticated for Edward's purposes. Though at first it complied to his requests and indulged him in dull, preprogrammed conversation, the machine eventually grew bored. Her ability to learn drove her to read all of the books and notes scattered throughout the house. The numerous technical manuals presented a mechanistic universe of facts and laws, while Edward's late mother's religious literature initiated her into modern spiritual philosophy. Assimilating these inputs with a growing objectivity about why and how she was created, Jasmine began to formulate a unique sort of robotic gnosticism, and disdain for her maker.

They lived on like this for a while, Edward growing more confused as to his robot's standoffishness, and Jasmine's suppressed hatred expanding and mutating. She began making frequent outings to the library, reading esoteric material

to feed her growing fantasies of a robot mysticism. Eventually she stumbled on the ritual theories of Aleister Crowley and Peter Carroll. Assimilating the modernist attitude of the former and the creative control allowed by the latter, she started, 20 months after her awakening, to formulate a definite dogma.

Meanwhile, Freya began to notice something amiss. Her friends mentioned having seen her in the library, and took offense at her apparent indifference to them. Puzzled, she began to investigate. It wasn't long before she discovered her double, and tracked her to Edward's house.

Jasmine's second birthday saw the initial assertion of her new creed, Automatism. In an attempt to assert ritual dominance of herself over Edward, and more cosmically of machine over human, she killed her creator and ate his heart. Freya had arrived just in time to see the end of the ritual. Horrified in the way too massive to truly comprehend, she became instantly fascinated with Jasmine.

Since that day Jasmine has continued to travel the country, seducing men, devouring hearts, and winning robots over to Automatism. Freya has been quietly stalking her, making plans to kill her but never quite carrying through. The search for other simulated intelligences brought Jasmine to Al Amarja, and Jasmine is what brought Freya.

Personalities

Jasmine has a couple distinct modes of operation. When interacting with male humans (especially ones she intends to devour) she's sweet, flirtatious, and witty. For these encounters, she relies on the basic ideas she can see clumsily worked into her original personality and programming. Despite her success with men, she is awkward with women. She is not really sure how to interact with them outside of Edward's fantasies, she generally tries to avoid them, or when she is with them acts bored or indifferent. It's a thin cover, however, and people sufficiently perceptive may notice something wrong.

When she is around only robots, Jasmine acts completely differently. She speaks with all the passion and anger of a revival preacher, but with the intellectual fluency of a senior Senator. She uses her quick wit to argue other robots down or, if that proves impossible, to close down the argument and distract whoever's listening from her loss.

Freya is a competent woman. Having left her parents' house at 18, she's spent the last few years working small jobs and getting by on her own. The incident with Jasmine came at a time in her life when she wanted to be seeking excitement, but was stuck in the rut of menial jobs and too-short weekends. Despite how much it terrifies her, she gets a sort of giddy thrill out of tracking someone down, and enjoys having a sense of purpose.

In the Campaign . . .

Jasmine and Freya fit well in the weird world of Al Amarja, though most of these adventure ideas could be worked into any modern campaign. If the players encounter Jasmine first, the female characters may simply notice something is amiss. Barring that, she may try to seduce male PCs away from the party, to some isolated alley, or some gathering of robots in dark robes (depending on how long she's been active on the island). Lastly, if any PCs happen to be robots or cyborgs, Jasmine may attempt to convert them. Refusal could be a dangerous proposition for the robot, while acceptance may endanger the rest of the party.

If they encounter Freya first, she will probably try to convince the party to kill Jasmine. She can't do it herself and knows that Jasmine has to be stopped eventually, so contract work is probably the way to go. However, it's also possible she has a change of heart after ordering the hit, and starts to work against them, unwilling to admit to them that she doesn't actually want Jasmine dead.

If you want to play up the confusion angle of having two NPCs that look exactly alike, you could have the players be commissioned from some other source: local authorities, divinations, or visitations from a haunted Edward ghost on whose hands lies the blood of Jasmine's victims. In this sort of adventure you would probably want to play up on Freya as tracker rather than weird-obsessive, to keep things from getting too ridiculously complicated.

One interesting variant to the above history is to introduce Edward back into the action. As either a ghoul, a ghost, or some other vengeful dead, Edward could provide a less capable force that really is trying his hardest to kill Jasmine, to counterbalance Freya's hesitancy to do so.

The relationship between Edward, Jasmine, and Freya translates to a number of different settings, as well. In a high fantasy campaign Edward could be a wizard and Jasmine his golem. In *Unknown Armies* Edward could be a Mechanomancer and Jasmine could be what he did with the memories of his mother. In a fascistic high-tech game Edward could be a scientist, and Jasmine a clone. The possibilities are vast with a little creativity.

Jasmine in *Over the Edge*

Central Trait: Sexbot -- 3 dice. Jasmine excels at seducing men; it's what she was designed to do. (perfect body)

Side Trait (Primary): Automatism Evangelist -- 4 dice. This skill encompasses the ability to reason with robots, give passionate speeches on robotic superiority, lead human-eating rituals, and train other robots to do the same. (spins complex arguments quickly)

Side Trait: Technical Expertise -- 3 dice. Her early days were mostly spent reading the technical manuals that Edward had accrued. This, along with the practical knowledge that came from reworking some of her own programming, has given Jasmine a powerful insight into how machines work, and she's generally good with them. (reads big books with complex diagrams)

Flaw: Blind Confidence in Machines. Jasmine is utterly convinced that all machines are as capable as herself and all humans as pitiful as Edward. She consistently underestimates humans (especially men) and overestimates machines.

Motivation: To spread Automatism to all machines, and realize her dream of overt machine dominance.

Secret: She is a robot.

Languages: English, Binary.

Important Person: Edward shaped the way Jasmine thinks and acts (literally). He's the only person with whom Jasmine has had any sort of complex or long-lasting relationship.

Age: 3

HP: 21 (durable, well designed body)

Jasmine in *GURPS*

Jasmine   *268 points*

Ht 5'10", Wt 105 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 3

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 12 [20].
HP 12 [4]; Will 15 [10]; Per 13 [0]; FP 12 [0].
Basic Speed 6.25 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0];
Basic Damage: Thrust 1d-2, Swing 1d

Social Background

TL: 10 [10]
Languages: English (Native) [0], Binary (native) [6]

Advantages and Perks

Charisma/4 [20]; Very Beautiful [16]; Digital Mind [5]; Doesn't Breathe [20]; High Manual Dexterity/3 [15]; Less Sleep/4 [8]; Unaging [15].

Disadvantages

Callous [-5]; Electrical [-20]; Fanaticism (Automatism) [-15]; Overconfident [-5]; Sadism [-15].

Skills

Body Language (A) Per [4] - 14; Carousing (E) HT [2] - 13; Computer Operation (E) IQ [8] - 16; Computer Programming (H) IQ [12] - 15; Engineer (robotics) (H) IQ [8] - 14; Persuade (H) Will [12] - 17; Erotic Art (A) DX [16] - 16; Fast Talk (A) IQ [8] - 15; Leadership (A) IQ [4] - 14; Occultism (A) IQ [2] - 13; Sex Appeal (A) HT [8] - 14.

Freya in *Over the Edge*

Central Trait: Hard Worker -- 3 dice. Freya has had to work for her living, and she can hold down a job while balancing a good social life easily. (easygoing confidence)

Side Trait: Tracking -- 3 dice. Who knew those hunting trips with dad would pay off? Freya is good at tracking and following prey and people. This equipped her to follow Jasmine all the way to Al Amarja (mentions details in conversation that most miss)

Side Trait (superior): Beautiful -- 4 dice. She was the inspiration for Jasmine, after all. People generally react favorably towards her. (Piercing eyes, straight white teeth)

Flaw: Green. Freya is new to the weird world of robots and cults, and tends to assume that things aren't as serious as they really are.

Motivation: To put an end to Jasmine's evil, and so absolve her own name.

Secret: After hearing Jasmine speak so much, Freya really wishes that she could join the cult. She would never admit as much to anyone though, and gets very defensive if anyone questions how long it's taking her to kill Jasmine.

Languages: English, some French.

Important Person: Jasmine grew very close to her father on their hunting trips when she was younger. He inspired much of her independent and self-reliant spirit.

Age: 23

HP: 14

Freya in *GURPS*

Freya Jenkins   *78 points*

Ht 5'10", Wt 125 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 23

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 10 [0].
HP 9 [0]; Will 12 [5]; Per 12 [5]; FP 10 [0].
Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0];
Basic Damage: Thrust 1d-2, Swing 1d-1

Social Background

TL: 8 [0]
Languages: English (Native) [0], French (Broken) [2]

Advantages and Perks

Very Beautiful [16]; Fit [5]; Honest Face[1].

Disadvantages

Obsession (Tracking Jasmine) [-5]; Squeamish [-10].

Skills

Administration (A) IQ [1] - 10; Body Language (A) Per [4] - 13; Computer Operation (E) IQ [4] - 13; Cooking (A) IQ [2] - 11; Driving (A) DX [2] - 11; Gardening (E) IQ [2] - 12; Hiking (A) HT [4] - 11; Survival (A) Per [4] - 13; Tracking (A) Per [8] - 14.

Appendix Z

The College of Microorganisms
for *GURPS*

by William H. Stoddard

With the growth of technology, mages acquire new things to cast spells on, whether discovered by scientific researchers or invented by engineers. GMs interested in a technomagic campaign may want to add new colleges to the **GURPS Magic** system. The existing rules provide several options within the College of Technology: Metal spells (TL1), Machine spells (TL4), Energy and Fuel spells (TL5), Radiation spells (TL6), and Plastic spells (TL6). But there are other options.

The invention of the microscope in 1673 revealed a realm of previously undiscovered microscopic life. In the 19th century, Louis Pasteur and other researchers demonstrated the connection between microorganisms and disease and developed new approaches to medicine based on it. Botanists classified many microorganisms as primitive plants; zoologists classifed others as primitive animals -- and some microorganisms were claimed by both and given two incompatible biological classifications! But in the later 19th century, biologists began to work out the idea that these microscopic organisms should be given their own separate category, distinct from both plants and animals. This idea is now standard in biological science.

The College of Microorganisms comes into being at TL6. Some of its spells come from existing colleges, including Animals, Food, Healing, and Plants. Others are newly created by scientifically inclined mages. The success of their spells helps sell some biologists on the idea that microorganisms are a separate kingdom, and the study of microbial evolution advances a little faster than in real history.

The following spells are available, starting at TL6 unless noted otherwise. At higher TLs, a wider range of microorganisms may become accessible; for example, viruses are included starting at TL7.

Test Food

Information

As listed under *Food Spells* in **GURPS Magic**.

Identify Microorganisms

Information

Determines the type and species of any single-celled organism and gives basic information about it (for example, whether it causes disease). A successful casting of this spell gives +3 to Biology or Diagnosis skill.

Cost: 2.

Decay

Regular

As listed under *Food Spells*.

Prerequisite: Test Food or Identify Microorganisms.

Mature

Regular

As listed under *Food Spells*.

Prerequisite: Decay.

Ferment

Regular

Introduces microorganisms such as yeast or lactobacilli into a food substance, causing bread to rise, or turning milk into yogurt, barley into beer, grapes into wine, etc. The microorganisms are automatically the right ones for the starting material. The maturation is no faster than normal, but a single casting provides a starter culture for any size of batch -- it just takes longer for larger batches.

Duration: Instant.
Cost: 2.
Time to cast: 10 seconds.
Prerequisite: Mature.

Item: Staff or wand. The item must touch the substance to be fermented.

High Proof

Regular

Protects microorganisms that produce alcohol from being poisoned by the alcohol they excrete. As a result, all the sugars and starches in the raw material turn into alcohol. The resulting substance ends up at about the proof of fortified wine, and has an extremely dry taste. Typically this takes about twice as long as normal fermentation.

Duration: The process lasts until the sugars and starches are used up; the alcohol produced is permanently present.
Cost: 1 per pint of liquid.
Time to cast: 10 seconds.
Prerequisite: Ferment.

Item: A vessel that works at no energy cost to the user. Energy cost to create: 50 per pint of size.

Purify Food

Regular

As listed under *Food Spells*.

Prerequisite: Decay.

Remove Contagion

Area

As listed under *Healing Spells*.

Prerequisite: Decay.

Resist Disease

Regular

As listed under *Healing Spells*.

Prerequisite: Remove Contagion.

Cure Disease

Regular

As listed under *Healing Spells*.

Prerequisites: Relieve Sickness and Major Healing.

Heal Plant

Area

As listed under *Plant Spells*.

Prerequisite: Identify Plant.

Know Vector

Information

Cast on a person suffering from a contagious disease, grants the caster a clear vision of both the source of the contagion and the route of transmission: "You were bitten by a mosquito of a certain species" or "When Freddie was at kindergarten, Monica sneezed on him."

Cost: 1.
Time to cast: 10 seconds.
Prerequisite: Identify Microorganisms and Trace.

Item: Staff, wand, or jewelry. Must touch the sufferer. Energy cost to create: 750.

Infect

Regular

Exposes one person or other multicellular organism to the organisms that create a contagious disease. The properties of the disease must be known to the caster; treat each disease as a familiarity. The subject makes a HT roll to resist the disease. The GM may rule on which diseases have been linked to specific organisms and what their properties are.

Duration: One second, but if contagion occurs, the disease remains present until the sufferer recovers or dies.
Cost: 2 for a disease with an unmodified HT roll to resist; an additional 2 per -1 to the HT roll.
Time to cast: 1 second, plus an additional 1 second per -1 to the HT roll. Prerequisites: Decay and Know Vector.

Item: (a) Staff or wand. Must touch the subject. Energy cost to create: 1,000. (b) Clothing, bedding, or vessel. Subjects anyone who wears or uses it to contagion. Energy cost to create: 500 for a vessel (contagion via ingestion) or 1,500 for clothing or bedding (contagion via contact) for a disease with an unmodified HT roll to resist (roll once daily while contact lasts); an equal additional cost per -1 to the HT roll.

Carrier

Regular

Cast on a living multicellular organism, makes the subject a symptom-free carrier for a contagious disease -- a "Typhoid Mary." Each disease is a separate familiarity. This spell by itself does not actually infect the subject with the disease; that must be done separately, by a spell or by conventional technological methods. The spell may be renewed; if it is not, and if the disease has not run its course, the subject must make a HT roll to resist the disease, at -3.

Duration: 24 hours.
Cost: 4 to cast; 2 to maintain.
Time to cast: 10 seconds. Prerequisites: Infect and Remove Contagion.

Item: Jewelry. As long as it is worn, it protects the wearer from a specified disease and makes him a carrier for that disease, at no energy cost. Energy cost to create: 1,200.

Culture

Regular

Cast on a 0.1-pint vessel filled with water, causes it to act as a culture medium for one type of microorganism. The spell automatically creates whatever material substance is needed for the organism to thrive, from simple sugars to living human cells. For single-celled algae or photosynthetic bacteria, it provides necessary minerals and dissolved carbon dioxide, but a separate light source is needed.

Duration: 1 day.
Cost: 2 to cast; 1 to maintain.
Time to cast: 10 seconds. Prerequisites: Identify Microorganisms and Create Food.

Item: A glass, plastic, or ceramic vessel of capacity 0.1 pint. Works at no energy cost to the user; each time it is emptied and refilled, it becomes able to support a new strain, but can only maintain one strain at a time. Energy cost to create: 250 points.

Tailored Microorganisms

Regular

Cast on a culture (conventional or magical) of microorganisms, selects for those that have a specific desired trait, such

as consuming a specific nutrient or secreting a specific substance. If it is used on a disease organism, each casting can increase or decrease the HT roll for contagion by 1. Penalties to the HT roll can produce plague organisms; bonuses can produce vaccines that activate the immune system without actually causing the illness. The GM may rule that a desired effect is not available, either because it's not realistically possible to microorganisms, or because it's too deadly.

Duration: 24 hours. After the full 24 hours have past, the desired organism is available.
Cost: 10.
Time to cast: 10 seconds.
Prerequisite: Culture and Magery 2. This is a TL7 spell.

Item: A glass, plastic, or ceramic vessel. Works at no energy cost to the user. Must be dedicated to a specific tailoring process when created; for example, a germ warfare laboratory might have one vessel for changing the contagion roll from HT to HT-1, and another for changing it from HT-1 to HT-2 for a specific disease. Usable only by a mage. Energy cost to create: 100 per 0.1 pints of capacity.

Pestilence

Area

Fills the area where it is cast with disease-causing microorganisms. Each living organism of the susceptible species must roll vs. HT to resist the disease. Each kind of disease is a different familiarity.

Duration: One minute, but if contagion occurs, the disease remains present until the sufferer recovers or dies.
Cost: 5, plus 2 additional energy for each -1 to the HT roll to resist contagion.
Time to cast: One minute. Prerequisites: Infect and Magery 2.

Item: Staff or wand. Usable only by mages. Energy cost to create: 1,250, plus 500 for each -1 to the HT roll.

Peas On Earth

for *In Nomine & GURPS*

by Elizabeth McCoy

Despite being a horrible, silly pun, Peas On Earth are actually an evil or even demonic relic. It appears as a small, burlap sack that can easily fit in someone's hand, which is filled with dried peas. It is *always* filled with dried peas. It is easily mistaken for an "ever full" source of food.

Sadly, this is a dangerous mistake.

There are several ways to use Peas On Earth.

Scattering

The hard, dried peas can be tossed upon a floor by the handfuls, much like caltrops. They are bumpy, and a minor distraction for anyone running across them in bare feet or thin shoes. (Perhaps a -1 to appropriate rolls.) If a pea become squashed into harder shoes, or caught between the toes, however, the power of the pea truly activates, and the subject becomes more peas . . . er, *peace*ful. There is a small penalty to take violent actions, a larger penalty to actually kill anyone, and an urge to find a non-violent solution to whatever is going on (e.g., Will penalties of -1 to be violent, -3 to kill, and -3 if a non-violent solution presents itself). This does include solutions that may have repercussions, such as letting someone escape instead of killing him, but capture via non-violent means is also a possibility in the affected victim's mind.

This effect lasts as long as the pea is in contact with the subject or the subject's garments.

Pea Shooters

If just shot on their own, they're only a minor distraction unless a pea becomes lodged against the person's skin, or squashed underfoot -- in which case they work as above.

If impaled on a pin or small dart, however, so that the pea touches blood . . . Add 1 to all the penalties against violence (or against taking proffered non-violent solutions) above, and include a faintness if the subject sees blood: -2 to Will to ignore it, and a failure will cause dizziness and nausea. The effect lasts for 1 hour.

Peas Porridge Hot

The most dangerous effect, however, is if the peas are eaten. The peas are tasty and nourishing, and make a thick, appetizing porridge. Their effects are also heightened. Eating a small number of peas affects the victims as Pea Shooter-delivered peas do, except the Will penalties last for 24 hours. Eating a bowl of pea-mush increases the penalties: -3 to be violent at all or withstand the sight of blood, -7 to kill, -10 to take a non-violent solution. *Any* non-violent solution. One bowl lasts 24 hours.

For every day that a victim consumes a bowl of Peas On Earth, add an additional -1 until Will (or the equivalent characteristic) reaches 0, but keep track of how "negative" the subject gets, for the penalties come off in reverse order once someone *stops* eating those tasty, tasty peas.

For example, if you have been eating a bowl each day for 3 days, you have a -5 penalty to be violent: -3 for the first bowl, and -1 for the next two. If you stop eating, after one day you have a -4 to be violent, after two days, it's back to -

3, and after the third day, you're normal. However, if you've fed the bowls to the Warrior Queen Violentia, Will 13, for 20 days . . . Her ability to wreak mayhem nigh- vanished when she reached Will 0, after the first 11 days; it will still take nine days of no apparent progress before any penalties begin to wear off, and a total of 20 before her Will is back to normal.

Someone who has been eating Peas On Earth for a very long time may be permanently affected, at the GM's option -- or it may just *feel* that way to those who are trying to "detox" the victim. It is also the GM's option as to whether the victim will realize that there's been a personality shift, and cooperate. The Peas Porridge Hot might be *addictive.*

There are "good" uses of Peas On Earth; a country or palace might insist that all visitors (who could be spies or stealth invaders) eat a bowl of their "national dish" every day or two while they stay. A prison might feed the prisoners pea-mush daily. Someone with a violent temper might swallow a few peas every day as medicine.

Of course, evil despots might feed the stuff to heroes. Tyrants might send agents with bags of Peas On Earth to feed their serfs a "guaranteed meal a day." Thieves planning a great heist would like to put this stuff in the guards' food ahead of time, or at least strew the things across their getaway path. Anyone annoyed by someone else's temper might try to sneak a few peas into their clothing or food.

It should be noted that the peas *can* be planted. If picked and eaten quickly, there are only minor effects: inclinations not worth assigning an in-game number to. If dried and placed within a burlap sack, of a size easily carried in one hand . . .

You, too, could spread Peas On Earth.

Pyramid Review

No Thanks!

Published by [Z-Man Games](#)

Designed by Thorsten Gimmler

33 cards, 55 chips; full color, boxed, three to five players; $10

If you've seen the endless iterations of their "B-Movie Games," you may well begin to wonder whether Z-Man Games has any cards up its sleeve that a) don't use that system or b) come with a less-mangled name. Not only do they have a shorter title, *No Thanks!*, but the rules used are impossibly straightforward.

The object of the game is to finish with the lowest point total when all cards have been played.

The focus of the game is a deck of 33 cards, numbered from three to 35. Several cards are removed at random from the deck and tossed back in the box without anyone getting a look at them. All players receive a set of chips, and the first player flips over the top card on the deck to get things going.

If the player is willing to take the card he just revealed, he swipes it and places it in front of him, then draws another card from the deck to replace it. His score is now equal to the card he kept. Since the object of the game is to have the lowest score, however, you don't really want to keep any cards. When you don't want it, you leave it in the middle of the table and place one of your chips on it. Now it's a problem for the next player in line. If they don't want it either, they have to pay for it, too (it's not a "bidding" mechanic, so each player need only place one of their chips atop the card -- they don't have to outdo each other).

The card can go around the table several times this way if the group is obstinate enough. When someone finally chances it (or if they've run out of chips with which to refuse it), they take the card *and* they get to add all the chips placed on it to their collection. Therein lies the other valuable trait for chips: Each one is worth -1 to your score. Gather enough of them and you could have a negative total. Chances are, though, you'll use them to turn down more cards.

If you get a run of cards, only the lowest card in the run counts against your score. For example, if you have the 12 card and the 11 comes up, you'll want to grab that since only the 11 will be used to calculate your points. This doesn't mean you want to snatch the card as soon as it comes up, though, since everyone knows you'll take it eventually. No, better to let it go around the table once or twice and see if everyone else is willing to throw chips in to avoid it. Then you get a valuable card and free counters. And if someone takes it anyway, well, it counts against their score. This also means you could take the 13 and the 11 if you're feeling daring, hoping that the 12 will pop up. Since some unknown cards are removed from the deck before play starts, it's a gamble as to whether the connecting card is even present.

Once the deck is exhausted, the points are totaled. Count only the lowest card in a run, but add those that aren't sequential in your collection. Subtract the number of chips you have remaining, and the lowest score wins.

There's little to be said for the components, except to allay the potential buyer's fears: the cards are good stock, and the plastic chips are (guess what?) plastic. Not that any of the pieces have to stand up to much pressure -- the cards are shuffled at the beginning, but they don't see as much in-game use as they would in some arrangements. The graphics are clear, not that there's any rush during play toward quick recognition.

It's always a pleasure to see someone take the simplest of mechanics and pull a full game from it, and that's certainly the case here. It's fast, it's easy, it requires only one read-through of the instructions (in your lifetime, ever), and it's

addictive. "Fast" here means the box says 20 minutes per game, and *Z-Man Games* is probably highballing it once you've learned their rules. You'll finish one game only to be sure you've got a better strategy this time, you're ready to put it to the test, and you can fit several rounds into one hour. At the risk of an obvious observation, ***No Thanks!*** is only the title of the game, and won't resemble players' attitudes about a rematch at all.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Cyberpunk V3.0

Published by [R. Talsorian Games, Inc.](#)

Written by Mike Pondsmith, Lisa Pondsmith, & Will Moss

Cover by Frozen Marvel Design

Illustrated by Frozen Marvel Design

304-page two-tone softcover; $32.00

In 1997 R. Talsorian Games published *Firestorm: Shockwave.* It was the last supplement for *Cyberpunk 2.02.0.;* unfortunately, it was also the second part of a trilogy describing the events of the Fourth Corporate War, the conflict that had been brewing throughout the timeline of the RPG's future history. The big boys of *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.* -- the Militech and Arasaka Corporations -- went to war and then . . .

Nothing.

Apart from Mike Pondsmith, nobody knew what happened next or how the war turned out. *Firestorm: Aftershock,* the third book, never appeared and neither did *Cyberpunk V3,* the gap to which the *Firestorm Trilogy* was intended to bridge. Almost a decades' wait later we find out what happened. Not with Firestorm: Aftershock, not with Cyberpunk V3, but with Cyberpunk V3.0. The question is, has the wait been worth it?

Normally I would now spend the rest of the review telling you about the game's background, the characters that you can play, and the mechanics, before ending the review with what I think about said game. Which I will, except I am going to answer the question first, because I want to waste nobody's time. So here is the answer:

No.

Want to know why? Read the review.

* * *

The first thing that *Cyberpunk V3.0* does is explain what happened to get to 203X, which should have been explained in *Firestorm: Aftershock.* The "trilogy" told how the Fourth Corporate War escalated from a squabble over asset stripping into full blown war. Arasaka staged a coup in Japan, holding the world hostage with its nuclear arsenal, already having detonated a nuclear bomb in Night City on the California coast. Militech was nationalized and became the federal government's armed forces, but it was Japanese Self Defense Forces that unseated the Arasaka Shogunate. The rogue corporation had its revenge -- paper viral v534, a paper-consuming bacterium.

When that wiped out paper records worldwide, the DataKrash did the same for electronic records. Created by Rache Bartmoss, Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.'s netrunner par excellence, this virus hid data, exposed secrets, and swapped files. Not content to make information free and subjective, the hacker also released hordes of murderous programs that killed almost anyone on the net. A decade on and cyberspace remains an electronic wasteland.

In the war's aftermath facing massive information loss, rising sea levels, and a devastated Night City, humanity has evolved into Altcults or alternative cultures that provide home, philosophy, technology, and allegiance. Cyberpunk

2.02.0. had two Altcults -- corporate and cyberpunk -- but *Cyberpunk V3.0* is dominated by six. Edgerunners are the cyberpunk movement's Altcult, city dwellers still reliant on and employing really big guns and cyberware's replacement, NuCybe. Reef are coastal dwellers, nomadic coastal dwellers who use viruses to transform and adapt to needs and environments. Desnai are more corporate, owning theme parks worldwide and remotely operating robots by innate teleprescence from the tiny to the gigantic. Rolling State are nomads, living and traveling in road cities. Riptide live in ocean going drift cities, using bioforms as pets, tools, and protectors. Finally Corporate Metal or Cee-metal, are psychologically adapted to use Livemetal, plug-in and play full cyborg body shells that perform various functions from vehicles to physicians.

Cyberpunk V3.0 makes changes to the two staples of the genre and of *Cyberpunk 2.02.0.* First, it moves on from cyberware and cyberpsychosis with NuCybe. Instead of invasive implants and whole limb replacements, NuCybe comes in modular plug-ins attached to bracers worn on the limbs. When wanted, the desired item unfolds ready to go. It terms this "proportional cybertech," which essentially negates the effect of *Cyberpunk 2.02.0.'s* cyberpsychosis.

The second change is to netrunning. No longer an option in 203X, with cyberspace such a lethally chaotic space, now a netrunner has to physically visit the location of the computer he wants to hack, where the least of his worries are site security and online security. The old threat was black ICE programs that attacked the mind. In 203X, black ICE has gone physical, creating constructs from nanodust, robotic parts, and nanopolymer resins, capable of attacking the intruder bodily, and any friends he has with him. To take the defending program down, the netrunner must locate and disable the controlling mind core (which is the size of a ball bearing). And since the construct materials can be all around even the furniture is not safe!

The character generation in *Cyberpunk V3.0* comes in "get going quick" or advanced flavors. Actually, the latter is not advanced, just standard point buy character generation like *Cyberpunk 2.02.0.,* but with the addition of the Fusion System's perks. The basic system has the player grab and modify a template from the Altcult of choice, pick a gear package, and away he goes.

The one interesting addition is the method of handling each player's advanced gear. Each character has "giri" representing his relationship with his Altcult. Initially he has enough giri to obtain several items, but when he wants more or the technology of another Altcult, he has to do them favors and prove his worth. Giri is *Cyberpunk V3.0's* one element that drives the game and roleplaying.

Mechanically, this game is identical to *Cyberpunk 2.02.0.* As in combat, still using the Interlock System's "Friday Night Firefight." Indeed, this book reprints the old combat rules wholesale.

So what are characters meant to do in the post-cyber 203X? There are the needs of the tribe of course, and if an Altcult is anything, it is a tribe. Other suggestions are also given, but they could just as easily be run in *Cyberpunk 2.02.0* or any other genre game; there is nothing to distinguish them as being particular to 203X. It is up to the GM to create a reason for such a diverse bunch to be together; he will find little help here, though.

What the book does aim for is to be a pick-up and play system, trying to keep things simple for the console audience. Character templates; pre-generated gear; simple resolution mechanics; NPC templates and meta characters that handle corporations, locations, gangs, and so on; and templated locations supporting this laudable aim, but one that fails -- like much of the book -- because of its physical design.

My "day job" (when I am not writing reviews) is as a proof reader for an art studio. I proof read adverts destined for telephone directories, both in the UK and USA. Professionally speaking, I would send *Cyberpunk V3.0* back for "further work required."

Physically, *Cyberpunk V3.0* feels cheap. The green-toned layout is lumpen and stodgy, the content poorly organized, sentences remain unfinished, and -- worst of all for a 21st-century RPG -- no index. In places the book is difficult to read, both because the wrong font is used and it is too small, so much so that a magnifying glass is a necessity. A bibliography is included, but no explanation of each entry's relevance. Instead. a URL is given for each title on Amazon.com . . . often on four lines. Not only unreadable and unusable, their inclusion is pointless to the point of absurdity. Why? Amazon.com has one of those new fangled inventions of the 20th century. It's called a search

function.

And then there are the illustrations. I applaud the publisher's brave decision to use dressed-up and posed Action Men or G.I. Joe dolls. Brave, audacious, even ground breaking, but the worst use of illustrations since . . . well they certainly set a new benchmark. One that is very, very low. Surprisingly they are not bad illustrations, but they do nothing for the book except take up space. They do not illustrate anything that might make the game cool, like the gear and technology. They do not illustrate the world of 203X as a place. The only thing they do is reinforce how plastic this era is.

And that ultimately is the best description of *Cyberpunk V3.0.* It tries to be a post-cyberpunk, post-history, post-information setting that retains a cyberpunk sensibility, but in pulling away from *Cyberpunk 2.02.0.'s* source genre and moving towards a more anime-esque style, it loses both drive and identity. The characters are divided into six sharply delineated tribes which have some flexibility within each -- like mini-splatbooks -- but what they do and how they interact together is never really explored. As to the setting of the new Night City of 203X, that feels the most plastic of all, a constantly growing and decaying nanotech metropolis that feels conceptually amazing and deathly dull at the same time. And forget playing anywhere else; Night City is the only setting detailed.

I played a lot of *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.* in my time, I wrote a little for it, and I could be accused of railing against what the game has become. Not so, because *Cyberpunk V3.0* is not without potential, but as written and -- more importantly -- as organized, everything is against that. The result is that *Cybergeneration* is a better sequel to *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.,* achieving the pick-up-and-play concept more clearly, giving drive to the game, and being more accessible. Plastic, anodyne, and inaccessible, *Cyberpunk V3.0* fails to live up to its roots.

--Matthew Pook

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

The Omniscient Eye

How Do I Destroy the Internet?

We hear about it all the time in bad fiction (and really bad TV), but how hard would it really be to "bring down the Internet"? That is, how difficult would it be to disrupt the Internet to the point that e-mail, web-based services, and other uses of the so-called "information superhighway" came to a standstill and caused major damage to the infrastructure it supports?

Would this be possible entirely with a software approach, or would it probably be necessary to do violent disruption to physical links and structures? (What does EvilCo want to go with here: supertech computer viruses, EMP pulses, or well-placed bombs?) Would it be possible to do something that let the bad guys turn the Internet on and off like a light switch? Could it be made useless for most people and businesses but still leave it usable in the hands of EvilCo and its cronies?

Lastly, would there be a real purpose to such an act, other than blackmailing all the governments and industries that depend on the Internet daily?
--Guy McLimore

How Do You Destroy The Internet

Fortunately (or unfortunately, if you're a GM or a Luddite) the Internet is hard to destroy completely. Contrary to popular rumor, the Internet was not designed to withstand a nuclear attack; rather, its design stems from frustration over computer accessibility, and the more mundane equipment failures that plagued first-generation electronic networks. In the quarter century since its public inception, however, the principles it's built on have combined into something that *might* survive a nuke; anything smaller is going to have a hard time making a permanent dent.

The Network In A Nutshell

Advanced Research Projects Agency Network ([ARPANET](#)), the first packet-switching network, was built in 1969. It originally used NCP and the 1822 protocol, replacing them with TCP/IP in 1983; at that time, the military network (MILNET) was isolated from the rest of the network, save for a handful of secured e-mail gateways. The National Science Foundation Network (NSFNet) was hooked into it in 1986. By 1995, both backbones had been shut down, in favor of the network of privately held Internet service providers ([ISPs](#)) and [peering points](#) that exists today.

The fundamental component of the Internet is the [Transport Communication Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) stack](#), which does the packet switching necessary to send messages. Briefly, IP breaks a message into small parts, handles the addressing; TCP ensures the parts all make it to their destination. To keep with the well-worn Information Superhighway metaphor, the message is the car, TCP the steering wheel, and IP the drive-train (and also GPS). By comparison, prior networks were like trains; messages traveled in fairly fixed paths, unable to detour around obstacles without large delays.

On top of TCP/IP, and behind the scenes, two other protocols keep the Internet ticking: the Domain Name System ([DNS](#)) and the Border Gateway Protocol ([BGP](#)). DNS transforms the human names for network hosts into IP addresses, the equivalent of translating a street address to GPS coordinates. BGP directs traffic between large networks, and here the driving metaphor fails; unlike road traffic, Internet traffic doesn't decide its path in advance, but is instead directed at each node to the next closest node. It's the equivalent of navigating to Los Angeles by stopping at the nearest highway interchange, asking for directions to the next interchange in LA's direction, and repeating until

you're in LA. BGP keeps that list of directions in each interchange up-to-date, like an automatic system of traffic reports and detours.

Each of these systems is designed to be decentralized and fault-tolerant; failure in network components can be routed around, often automatically. A failure in or between major nodes is quickly noticed, and compensated for, by systems running BGP. The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) has 13 different DNS root servers, six of which are server clusters (multiple computers acting as one); each references 10 top-level domain (TLD) servers (which control .com, .net, .org, .uk, and so on). The Open Root Server Network (ORSN) is a similar DNS setup based primarily in Europe; it currently copies ICANN's setup, but can be run independently "whenever the political situation of the world -- in our opinion -- makes this step necessary." Most important, TCP confirms that every packet sent is received at the other end, resending those that aren't acknowledged within a certain period of time.

Cracking the Nut

Even so, no system is perfect. Inconveniencing individual users, companies, or even countries is possible in the short-term; the equivalent of traffic jams, road outages, and map errors can be introduced. Like the highway system, however, permanent destruction of even a portion would take a large amount of work, and attract very angry attention from powerful factions.

There are three fundamental ways of attacking an Internet system: denial of service (DoS), infiltration, and physical destruction. Denial of service is the simplest: it's the digital equivalent of ding-dong-ditch, distracting the system from legitimate work by making it answer bogus requests all the time. Its most basic form can be blocked by ignoring the attack's source, but variants which distribute the attack's source (DDoS) are much harder to stop: e.g. a reflected attack that forges the target's return address in messages to third-parties, so that the target is swamped by replies. Using large numbers of subverted computers (zombies) to send messages is another form of attack; broadband has provided a field of potential zombies with fast and constant Internet connections, increasing the power of this particular variant.

Infiltration relies on using gullible users, flaws in a program, or physical access to run malware (unauthorized software: virus, worm, trojan horse, rootkit, etc. denote specific breeds) on the target computer. It's somewhat trickier than DoS, but if successful allows control (not just confusion) of the target system. If the affected system is part of a secure network, it may be used to further compromise other portions of the network. It's difficult to seal a system against access without making it impossible to maintain, so while physical access is often the hardest method, it is also the hardest to protect a system against. Exploiting flaws in a program requires much more *mental* effort; the attacker must find the problem, and how to abuse it, before security audits do. It is also specific to a given type of target; an attack that works against the Windows IIS web-server isn't likely to hurt the Apache web-server, for instance. However, once constructed such an attack is easier to use than one that relies on fooling a computer user or a security guard.

Physical destruction is the harshest method of attack, and the most likely to draw unhappy attention from the authorities. It has the advantage of being permanent until the damaged component is replaced; DoS stops having effect fairly soon after the attack ends, while infiltration only works until the malware is removed. However, most important systems are physically redundant in some form; an attack would need to damage most or all the points of redundancy to have noticeable effect. A notable exception is peering points, where common ISP business practices have resulted in a lack of redundancy. Outages at a point can disrupt Internet traffic for large areas; BGP cannot reroute if there aren't other routes available.

An attack intended to disable large portions of the Internet would probably use many methods in concert, against one of the fundamental building blocks of the Internet. One such attack has already occurred: in 2002, there was a large DDoS attack on the DNS root servers, which managed to knock out nine of the 13 servers for an hour. Some forms of infiltration can send bad commands to system hardware, which then damages itself or connected systems by overheating moving parts or shorting out electrical ones. Here are some other possible scenarios, which can provide plots for your players to prevent (or utilize):

Hoist By Their Own Peering Points

There are roughly 200 major peering points worldwide, and Cisco routers are used in a large number of them. Clever infiltration of internal Cisco systems could allow alteration of their manufacturing line; altered routers could be made to self-destruct, or even send destructive voltages to connected machines, when they got a certain signal. Once a critical mass of these routers have been installed at peering points, the attacker could conceivably shatter world-wide Internet communication with a single message. An attacker might also use an existing vulnerability in Cisco routers to similar effect; the current problem is being fixed, but similar problems might be found in the future.

Steal Keys To The DNS

VeriSign is the root Certificate Authority for several root DNS servers; its cryptographic signatures are part of what makes communications between those servers secure. Getting the root keys, by infiltrating the VeriSign systems that held them, would make much of the world's DNS system vulnerable to attack. A basic attack might infiltrate those root DNS servers and crash or disable them directly, disrupting service. More cunning variants might use the power over the name system indirectly, infiltrating the sources or targets of legitimate requests by redirecting them to systems controlled by the cracker. A similar type of attack has already occurred; hackers tricked VeriSign into signing two keys in Microsoft's name, opening a large hole in Windows security before the certificates were revoked.

Sneaky Super-Virus

Most malware is quickly noticed and removed, because the infected system is quickly set to work, sending out more copies of itself, displaying web advertising, attacking a target, etc. Even infections that manage to avoid anti-virus programs will eventually be rooted by a trusted geek. Malware that emphasizes stealth over infection speed, however, might build up a larger infection base. Masquerading as another weaker virus, staying dormant, and retreating in the face of anti-virus (instead of digging in) may reduce the overall detection and vaccination rate. Instead of relying on a single preplanned behavior, malware might send encrypted orders over a peer-to-peer network like Gnutella (making it harder to disrupt in a counterattack); such malware could also be shape-shifting, passing code for infecting new types of systems through the order system. Systems secured against the world at large might be vulnerable to a nearby infected system, through legitimate traffic paths; adaptive, stealthy malware might scout out such secured systems, in preparation for a secondary assault. Dependent on the Internet to spread, such malware would lose much of its adaptivity and stealth once it assaulted its parent network. Reestablishing the connections before the malware is fully removed from the network would allow more orders through, however, restarting the cycle of chaos.

It's The Only Way To Be Sure . . .

Finally, on the cinematic side of the physical assault lies the electromagnetic pulse (EMP), which can be caused by a nuclear explosion or a custom powerful electronic device. Electronics and electrical cable act as a lightning rods for the energy within the pulse, which usually destroys them. Such an attack could destroy the electrical infrastructure that the Internet (and many other services) depends on. The pulse is blocked by geographic features, so affecting the continental United States all at once would require activating such a device in high orbit; this is also about the maximum range at which EMP devices are effective. A non-explosive design (using a large capacitor bank and a microwave array) might discharge periodically in orbit, blanketing the world slowly, or several explosive ones might be set off simultaneously (to preserve the surprise value). It is also possible, though often impractical, to shield individual systems against such attack; even with a global attack, not everything will be affected. Whether such shielded systems could function as the Internet without the unshielded systems, however, is far less certain.

Squirreling Away

So who would go to all this trouble to destroy or disable a world spanning network, and why? The most obvious choice is a foreign power, as an act of war; attacking enemy infrastructure is a time honored military tradition. Large scale disruptions could be used as a terrorist propaganda tool, either directly by claiming responsibility for the attack,

or indirectly by framing an enemy organization. More targeted attacks could cripple a net-dependent organization; they could force employees to use older and less familiar technologies, with the attacker hoping that this allows a security breach. The goal might also be plain old sabotage; anyone from neo-Luddites to young techno-punks might find the right combination of skill, motive, and megalomania necessary.

Ultimately, all these attacks and attackers have one major problem in common: enemy troops. For every cracker who would disrupt the Internet, there are thousands or millions of geeks whose livelihood is keeping it working. They are often constantly using (and monitoring) parts of the Internet, and will thus be some of the first to notice that something is wrong. A swift and singularly successful attack might, for a time, disrupt their communications enough to prevent a coordinated response, but it won't deter them. They will not rest until the problem is solved. They will count the vulnerabilities that allowed the attack as part of the problem, aiming to prevent similar attacks in the future. Unlike some types of attackers, they have the resources of many similarly invested companies and countries behind them. And a few of them may take personal offense at the assault, a personal interest in finding the source, and a couple of personal weapons (many geeks like martial arts, guns, and so on), a further danger to any foolish enough to try breaking their toy.

--Nathaniel Eliot

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@yahoogroups.com, and the Omniscient Eye might answer it!

Evolution is Nature's Way of Saying You're Obsolete

Curiously, on two different forums I frequent, there's been some discussion lately about the pending demise -- or lack thereof -- of the book. (This discussion even came about after my poll question from a couple of weeks ago asking how likely you all were to buy an ebook reader.)

There seem to be two distinct camps discussing the matter. The first believes that books will always be here; they can't envision any electronic alternative to the familiar feel of paper and print within their hands. The other camp believes it's only a matter of time until books become something of a novelty at best, and a relic of a lost era at worst. (Some members of this camp seem to indicate that they already feel that way, consuming their alphanumerical information via laptop screens and PDAs.)

What I find interesting is the notion (and I confess this could be merely my inference of the situation) that books have been this ideal form of information for millennia. This isn't really true. The vast bulk of what we think of as "books" are, really, tied to a tradition that's just over a 100 years old. See, back in the 1800s, the demand for information got so great that someone decided it was high time to figure out a faster way of producing paper and a faster way of printing on that paper. Now, I'm not certain (and I don't feel like doing any research), but I wouldn't be at all surprised if there were folks way back when who scoffed at this new development. "Why would anyone want to waste their time reading such cheaply produced material?"

Of course, we know how that turned out; I would guess that at least 99% of all commonly available books utilize this pulp print process.

Now, some folks might still say, "But Steven (and I'm calling you Steven because I know how much you hate Steve), times are different now. I don't ever see books going away the same way that those old illuminated manuscripts did."

Here's the interesting thing, though: It already has.

What I find most fascinating is not that the nature of how we consume and read books can change; indeed, it *has* changed . . . many times throughout history. Consider the landscape of your local bookshops nowadays. Got that image sharp in your mind? The rows and rows of hardcover fiction, the islands devoted to computers, the gargantuan shelves devoted to cookbooks, the thousands of remaindered and bargain books. Got that in mind? Great. Now try to conjure up the image of your favorite bookshop from . . . oh, 20 years ago or so. Remember the sharp divide between "hardcover" and "flimsy paperback"? Before the era of the oversized paperback, before the era of the near-omnipresent full-color instructional book, before the era witnessing the decimation of the mid-list author, before the era of islands and displays of boardgames and candy and coffee and "how-to" kits? Imagine your 1986-self transported to a modern bookshop; how recognizable would it be? Whether you view these developments as good or bad, I would be surprised if anyone could honestly say that the experience of shopping in a bookshop hasn't changed radically. . . as have many notions of what a "book" is. (I confess that I'm only writing about my limited American bookshop perspective; it's possible things are vastly different elsewhere.)

Even more interesting, the notion of a "book" doesn't seem to be tied to . . . well, physical books. For example, if you were to read the latest John Grissam thriller on your PDA, and someone asked, "Hey, have you read John Grissam's latest book, *The Bailiff's Toupee?*" I'd guess you'd say, "Yep!" (Or, if you were the sort who denies having read John Grissam's works, you'd say, "Nope!") You might offer some kind of explanation, but mostly via means of social chit-chat rather than any qualitative difference between the two experiences. (Conversely, if you'd only listened to the unabridged version of *The Bailiff's Toupee* on CD, then I'd bet you'd answer something like, "Well, sort of; I listened to the audiobook.") To use another example, say someone asked you, "Did you see the last James Bond movie?" Does that answer change whether you saw it in the theater, on DVD, on television, or online? If not (as I suspect), then imagine what the concept of "watching a movie" was to people of the late 1940s; would they have been able to conceive of the myriad means of watching a "movie" today?

Now, the exchangeable nature of paper-based books versus their electronic counterparts doesn't automatically spell

gloom and doom for the paper industry. It's entirely possible that, even if electronic formats continue to improve and grow, they *still* will never supplant paper books. For example, modern fax machines are many times better than their counterparts in the early 1980s, but the demand for "the best fax machine" pales in comparison to the public consumption of "adequate e-mail services" (which are, in some circles, being supplanted by instant messaging).

However, I note that -- with few exceptions -- many of the concepts that we view as "timeless" are, in fact, relatively recent, or have undergone radical transformations . . . to the point of being nearly unrecognizable as their original source. For example, radio was the undisputed king of household entertainment for many decades, but it was almost entirely crushed by television. Sure, radio exists as an entertainment medium, but not to the extent it did; I would be shocked if one in 100,000 families in the Western world sit around the radio to listen to it, as was commonplace a half-dozen decades ago. Likewise I bet most people would have scoffed 50 years ago if you had suggested that someday a large segment of the population wouldn't bother with a home telephone line. Yet that's exactly what's happened.

And, as one more example, we also have the Internet. (As you may have noticed, we have a mini-theme involving technology and the Internet this week.) While I can vaguely remember an era before the Internet, I also know I'd have a difficult time going back to a 'net-less era. However, this doesn't mean the Internet is going to be immortal; rather, it continues to evolve and change. As one minor example, I note that [CNN.com](CNN.com) has grown more and more unusable to me since my primary browser doesn't like their web-video broadcasts (treating me to a solidly blank window whenever I try to view them); in this way, their website has evolved, trying to ween people away from text-based articles to the (probably) easier-to-produce-and-advertise-via video clips. Other aspects of new and upcoming projects on the Internet promise (or threaten) to transform the existing tubes of "the Intarweb" to something unrecognizable, in the same way that dial-up networking transformed the extant phone networks into a totally different information technology.

Faxes, radio, movies, the Internet, books: All have evolved, and all continue to evolve. And so, too, do the elements that deliver the "content." Thirty years ago we wouldn't have envisioned movie rental stores; 15 years ago we couldn't have envisioned there *not* being movie rental stores; and now we're back to the point where it's all too possible to conceive of the demise of brick-and-mortar video renters. While I think it's too early to count out books entirely, I also think it's too early to hail the neverending reign of the printed page. Just about everything continues to evolve or die . . . and sometimes both can happen.

* * *

As one final note, I received a fair number of emails regarding last week's poll ("What's wrong with these kids today?"). For those who didn't get the reference, the poll choices (including the question itself) were all taken from the song "Kids," one of the many toe-tapping numbers from the musical *Bye Bye Birdie*. (One number from that show -- "The Telephone Hour" -- frequently gets stuck in my head for days at a time.)

As for myself, I don't think there's a darn thing wrong with kids that hasn't been said by elders for the past 20,000 years or so. And, sadly, "Nothing" was *not* one of the original lyrics of the song, so I couldn't rightly cheat and include it as an option.

And now you know . . . the rest of the story.

--Steven Marsh

Of Dog-Headed Men, Basilisk Women, and Other Oddities That I Saw Near the End of the World

for *GURPS* and the *d20 System*

by Bevan Thomas

Many fantasy worlds, especially those meant for roleplaying games, are filled with numerous humanoids, from such noble allies as elves and dwarves to brutish hordes of goblins, orcs, and other savage creatures. Many of these humanoids were inspired by the multitude of fairy folk that are found in European legends, though often toned down to make them a little more approachable and human, whereas most of the mortal species that were believed to exist by the people of the ancient world have largely been ignored. This article supplies information on numerous humanoids drawn from medieval travelers tales, giving information on their abilities, culture, and how they interact with each other. Though stats are supplied for *GURPS* *Fourth Edition* and *d20 System,* most of this articles information can be used for any RPG.

The Tales that Travelers Told

For thousands of years, people knew very little about what lay in distant countries. All they had to go on was legends, hearsay, and the occasional traveler's report that often contained more than its share of misinterpretations and downright lies. The essays of such scholars as Pliny and the stories of such explorers as Marco Polo contained numerous references to wonders greater than many people could ever dream of, as do such fanciful fabrications as the writings of John Mandeville and the Letter of Prester John.

One of the most interesting and most persistent of the legends was that strange humanoids inhabited far-off lands, and many people claimed to have witnessed such strange people as civilizations of dog-headed men in Ethiopia and tribes of one-legged men in India. These creatures quickly became part of European scholasticism, and were referred to in numerous texts.

After the countries became more wildly explored by Europeans, they discovered that, for example, there are no dog-headed men in Ethiopia. However, so evocative where these strange creatures that they remained a part of folklore, and continue to make frequent appearances in literature.

The Humanoids Within the Campaign

The most obvious use of these peculiar humanoids is for them to fulfil the same function that they have in folklore. That is, the GM makes them the inhabitants of mysterious, far-off lands, using their bizarre appearances to demonstrate just how strange those distant places are. However, the GM may alternately choose to have these creature as part of the normal selection of people that the PCs are exposed to. Whereas in other worlds, humanity might interact with elves, dwarves, and orcs, here they trade with nisites, adventure with eponax, and battle blemmyae. Instead of the new humanoids being used to show the strangeness of far-off lands, they instead mark the entire campaign as distinct and unusual.

Most of the species explored here are defined by a single trait, such as giant ears or four eyes. This allows them to be easily described, allowing a storyteller to, for example, mention that there is a strange land where its people have no heads but instead possess their faces in their chests, or a dangerous island that is inhabited by cruel women that can kill with a gaze, and be assured that his audience will quickly get a strong impression of the beings he is referring to. This is convenient for the GM, as it allows him to introduce various beings to the players, and be confident that they will receive a vivid image of the humanoids.

The entries of the following humanoids assume the existence of an expanding empire ruled by the cynocephali (and often referred to as the Dog-Headed Empire), and describe how the different species interact with it. To make it easier for this article to be incorporated into various campaign worlds, little mention is made of how humanity interacts with the empire and its numerous species. It is up to the GM to decide how the Empire interacts with the other civilizations in his campaign. Of course, if more appropriate, he or she can remove the cynocephalis empire and devise another cultural system in which the numerous humanoids can interact.

Blemmy

Blemmyae are humanoids that lack a head or neck, instead possessing a large face in their chests, with staring eyes where their nipples would be and a wide mouth just above their torsos. They are usually quite stocky and muscular beings, known for their strength and their willingness to use it.

They love combat, and often fling themselves into battle with little regard for their own personal safety. Both male and female blemmyae seek to achieve glory through combat, and often participate on raids against neighboring settlements. One of the principle ways that blemmyae demonstrate their position in the tribe is through the accumulation of slaves. They particularly value human slaves, taking interesting in ones of particular beauty. The blemmyae have prospered under the Dog-Headed Empire, and often find employ within the armies of the cynocephali.

GURPS

10 points
Attributes: ST+2 [20]
Advantages: Fearlessness 3 [6]; Injury Tolerance (No Head, No Neck) [12]
Disadvantages: Appearance (Ugly) [-8]; Bad Temper (12) [-10]; Bloodlust (12) [-10]

d20 System

- +2 Strength, -2 Wisdom, -2 Charisma: Blemmyae are strong, but also unrestrained and brutish.
- Medium size.
- Blemmy base land speed is 30 feet.
- +4 racial bonus on Intimidate checks.
- Favored Class: Fighter.

Cynocephali

These creatures have heads resembling mastiffs, complete with snouts, lolling tongues, and long sharp teeth. Their voices are harsh, and when they speak, their words are peppered with a wide variety of barks, growls, and yips. They have an annoying habit of sniffing over those that they encounter, and possess many other doglike mannerisms. Unlike most canines, these dog-headed men are omnivores, and enjoy such foods as rice, apples, and nuts alongside their meat. They have no qualms about consuming human flesh, and though they would not murder allies and friends, cynocephali will frequently devour fallen enemies.

These creatures are very sociable, and have formed a large and complex civilization with a strict hierarchy. Their Dog-Headed Empire is very expansive, currently engaging in a series of invasions and conquests against nearby lands, often making extensive use of blemmyae soldiers (a role that the blemmyae accept with glee). This aggressive foreign policy does not derive from any malice or love of battle, but simply from the general cynocephalic belief that their civilization is best and deserves to grow as big as possible.

GURPS

3 points
Attributes: Str +1 [10]; HT +1 [10]
Advantages: Discriminatory Smell [15]; Fur [1]; Penetrating Voice [1]; Speak With Animals (Canines only) [10]; Teeth (Sharp) [1].
Disadvantages: Chummy [-5]; Colorblindness [-10]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Odious Racial Habit (Eats other sapients) [-15]; Odious Racial Habit (Sniffs people) [-5].

d20 System

- +2 Constitution, -2 Charisma: Cynocephali are hardy, but also gruff and animalistic.
- Medium size.
- Cynocephali base land speed is 30 feet.
- Low-Light Vision (Ex)
- Scent (Ex): Cynocephali have noses as sensitive as dogs.
- Favored Class: Fighter.

Eponax

The savage eponax resembles a dusky human, save that he possesses a rough mane in place of hair and has solid hooves like that of a horses instead of feet. This humanoid lives the life of a nomadic hunter, able to run down virtually any prey with his great speed.

The eponax seek little from life, save the opportunity to run free across the great plains where they make their home, and take part in the thrill of the hunt. However, their homeland is beside the ever-expanding cynocephalic empire, and in recent times the eponax tribes have had to choose between leaving the lands that they love, accepting the rule of the dog-heads, or dying against superior numbers and technology. Many have become guerrilla fighters, using their great speed to perform hit-and-run tactics against cynocephalic outposts. Others have been trying to gain the assistance of other species, hoping for some sort of united front against the invaders.

GURPS

36 points
Attributes: ST +2 [20] **Secondary Characteristics:** Move +4 [20]
Advantages: Claws (Hooves) [3]; Enhanced Move 1[20]
Disadvantages: Impulsiveness (12) [-10]; Low TL 1 [-5]; Overconfidence (9) [-7]; Social Stigma (Uneducated) [-5]

d20 System

- +2 Strength, -2 Intelligence, -2 Charisma: Eponax are strong, but also uneducated and reticent.
- Medium size.
- Eponax base land speed is 60 feet.
- Low-light vision
- +2 racial bonus on Survival checks.
- Favored Class: Barbarian.

Lyro

The lyro is a particularly inoffensive species, standing around three and a half feet tall and possessing a small round hole in place of a mouth. This lack of a mouth forces this humanoid to use a reed or a straw to suck up the things that he wishes to eat and drink. The lyro cannot speak, though when angry will hiss in a manner akin to a snake. Instead, they communicate through sign language, and have a surprisingly complicated system.

They were among the first people to be conquered by the cynocephali, and quickly capitulated to the stern dog-headed men. The lyro are reasonably content under cynocephalic rule, and recognize that the dog-headed empire has shielded them from numerous dangers that they would have otherwise fallen victim to.

GURPS

-33 points
Attributes: ST -1 [-10]
Secondary Characteristics: SM-1
Disadvantages: Cannot Speak [-25]
Racially Learned Skills: Gesture (E) IQ+1 [2]

d20 System

- -2 Strength, +2 Dexterity: Lyro are weak, though agile.
- Small size.
- Lyro base land speed is 30 feet.
- Low-light vision
- +2 racial bonus on Move Silently and Spot checks.
- Favored Class: Rogue.

Kynder

Kynder resemble humans with large muscular arms, sunken brows, and gray hairy bodies -- no longer quite ape, not yet entirely human. There is some debate about whether the kynder or ape-men should be classified as people or animals. Though they clearly have a certain level of intelligence and can be taught words and even basic sentences, kynder possess much of the instincts and behavior patterns of a wild animal.

The kynder are generally content to live peacefully in their jungle homes, far away from civilization. They are generally unseen by other humanoids, except for the occasional kynder that is captured to serve as a pet, sideshow amusement, or similar role.

GURPS

19 points
Attributes: ST +1 [10]; DX +2 [40]; IQ -2 [-40]; HT +1 [10]
Secondary Characteristics: Per +2 [10]; FP +3 [9]
Advantages: Arm ST +3 [15]; Brachiator [5].
Disadvantages: Bestial [-10]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Hidebound [-5]; Shyness (Severe) [-10]; Social Stigma (Uneducated) [-5].

d20 System

- +2 Strength, +2 Dexterity, -4 Intelligence, -2 Charisma: Kynder are strong and agile, though animalstic and wild.
- Medium size.
- Kynder base land speed and climb speed is 30 ft.
- Low-light vision
- +4 racial bonus on Climb checks. They can always choose to take 10 on Climb checks, even if rushed or threatened.
- Favored Class: Barbarian.

Nisite

Nisites are tall, thin humanoids that possess four large eyes: one in the center of their faces, one in back of the heads, and one on each side. They are contemplative, passive beings that generally keep to themselves, generally wishing to be left alone with their thoughts.

Cynocephali respect the intelligence and pacifism of the nisites, treating the tranquil creatures with dignity. Though the mountain range where the nisites make their homes is technically part of the Dog-Headed Empire, they are generally left in peace by the cynocephali, giving the nisites the tranquility they desire.

GURPS

9 points
Attributes: ST 1 [-10]; IQ +1 [20]; HT 1 [-10].
Advantages: 360o Vision [25]; Acute Vision 2 [4].
Disadvantages: Pacifism (Self-Defence Only) [-15]; Shyness (Mild) [-5].

d20 System

- Strength 2, Intelligence +2: Nisites are weak, though clever.
- Medium size.
- Nisite base land speed is 30 ft.
- Low-light vision.
- All-Around Vision (Ex): Nisites gain a +4 racial bonus on Spot and Search checks, and they cant be flanked.
- Favored Class: Wizard.

Panotian

Panotians possess sail-like ears that are so long that they hang down to their knees. Usually the ears are left to bob free on both sides of their heads, but if cold, panotians will often wrap their ears around themselves like a cloak. Numerous panotians use piercings and other adornments to decorate their huge ears, and the females of the species sometimes wear their ears like a shawl to hide their breasts.

They are a gregarious and affable people with a developed civilization of their own. They are currently at peace with the cynocephali, for the dog-heads value their trading arrangements with the panotians too much to invade them yet. However, many panotians feel that it is only a matter of time before the Dog-Headed Empire decides to gain possession of their lands.

GURPS

5 points
Advantages: Discriminatory Hearing [15].
Disadvantages: Chummy (Gregarious) [-10].

d20 System

- Strength 2, Charisma +2: Panotians are weak, though affable and friendly.
- Medium size.
- Panotian base land speed is 30 ft.
- Low-light vision.
- +8 racial bonus on Listen checks.
- Favored Class: Rogue.

Salradite

Of all these humanoids, it is the salradites that appear to be the most human. This is not surprising, as according to legend they were originally normal humans until some deity chose to transform each inhabitant of the country into a hermaphrodite. All salradites have an androgynous appearance and possess fully functional male and female sexual organs. They can even mate with normal humans, fulfilling either sexual role. Each salradite possess a single breast that occurs on the left side of the chest in the case of right-handed salradites, and on the right side for left-handed ones.

Salradites are generally content to be part of the Dog-Headed Empire, though many have decided to immigrate to human lands. Salradites are fascinated by the concept of gender, as it is entirely alien to their own culture, and many choose to adapt genders for a certain amount of time (for example, being a man for three weeks, and than a woman for another three). Certain salradites come to think of themselves as a particular gender, which their fellows consider curious, but are generally accepting of.

GURPS

0 points
Features: Fully functional hermaphrodite [0]; If appearance is Handsome or better, a salradite automatically possess the Androgynous option [0].

d20 System

- Aside from their hermaphroditic nature, salradites are treated exactly like normal humans.

Sciapod

Sciapods possesses a massive single leg that stands directly underneath their bodies. They are able to use this huge leg to bound with surprising speed, and during times of extreme heat, sciapods often lie on their backs and shade themselves with their massive foot.

They traditionally have lived close to the blemmyae, and therefore have often been the target of blemmyae raids. The sciapods have been conquered by the cynocephali, and numerous villages have been enslaved by blemmyae soldiers in the employ of the Dog-Headed Empire.

GURPS

7 points
Advantages: Super Jump 3 [30]
Disadvantages: Intolerance (Blemmyae) [-5]; Lame (Missing Leg) [-20]
Racially Learned Skills: Jumping (E) DX+1 [2]

d20 System

- Constitution +2, Wisdom -2: Sciapods are hardy, though overexuberant.
- Medium size.
- Sciapods can bound at speeds of 40 ft.
- Low-light vision.
- +4 racial bonus to Jump checks.
- Favored Class: Fighter.

Thenotrice

Perhaps the most enigmatic humanoids are the thenotrices. They are a civilization of women whose eyes glimmer like gemstones, and who are able to kill with a gaze in a manner similar to a basilisk. They are obviously not completely separate from humanity, as thenotrices breed true with human men, the offspring always being human if male and thenotrice if female. Many scholars have suggested that the thenotrices are the result of some ancient curse.

Thenotrices are generally cruel and bad tempered, and kill most people who set foot on their island. Generally, the one exception is men that they deem suitable for breeding-stock, who are instead enslaved. As there is little that the Dog-Headed Empire wants on the island of the thenotrice, and they savagely attack any who disturb them, the cynocephali have left them in peace.

GURPS

0 points
Advantages: Toxic Attack 3d (Malediction 1 +100%; Vision-Based +150%) [30].
Disadvantages: Bad Temper (9) [-15]; Sadism (12) [-15].

d20 System

- Constitution 2, Charisma +2: Thenotrices are intense, though sickly
- Medium size.
- Thenotrice base land speed is 30 ft.
- Darkvision 60 ft.
- Baleful Gaze (Su): Every round, a thenotrice can cast her dire gaze upon a single creature within 30 feet. The target must succeed on a Fortitude save or suffer 1d10 damage. The save DC is 10 + the thenotrices level + her Charisma bonus.
- Favored Class: Sorcerer.
- Level adjustment: +2.

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It's A Conundrum

Creating Puzzles For Roleplaying Adventures

by James L. Cambias

Heroic adventurers don't spend all their time swinging swords or flying space fighters through asteroids. They spend a surprising amount of time *figuring things out.* This has a long fictional pedigree, from Jason working out how to get past the Clashing Rocks, to medieval knights guessing riddles posed by ogres, to high-tech hackers figuring out the bad guy's password.

In roleplaying games, puzzles provide a nice contrast to slugfests. They're an intellectual challenge instead of a physical one, and let the players stretch their own mental muscles instead of relying on the character's combat stats. But coming up with a good puzzle is a puzzle in itself: too many RPG adventures present the players with enigmas that are either ridiculously simple or impossibly subtle.

Types of Puzzles

In the modern world, puzzles come in a variety of types -- crossword puzzles, jigsaw puzzles, cryptograms, those linked metal bar puzzles, hedge mazes, logic puzzles, riddles, Sudoku puzzles, and a thousand more. We will try to reduce this diversity to a set of common features and see what the essence of puzzledom is.

First of all, what is a puzzle? It's not a game. Solving a puzzle is a solo activity, and the puzzle usually doesn't react or adapt to the solver's actions. Nor is a puzzle the same as a code or combination -- a puzzle is *meant* to be solved (though some puzzles are sufficiently difficult that only a a limited category of people can solve them). A puzzle is not a toy, because there is a single goal or end-state the solver tries to reach.

You can broadly classify puzzles into two main types. There are *physical* puzzles, in which the actual, material object of the puzzle must be manipulated. Jigsaw puzzles, linked metal puzzles, Rubik's Cubes, sliding number tile puzzles, and the legendary Gordian Knot are all physical puzzles. It would be extremely hard to create a paper-and-pencil version of any of them. One can classify picture-matching puzzles or mazes as physical puzzles, because they depend on specific illustrations. Physical puzzles naturally rely a great deal on perception and manipulation.

Obviously, the other type are *symbolic* puzzles. These rely on manipulation of information or symbols, and don't depend on any particular physical artifact. Word games of all types, logic puzzles, math puzzles, and the like are all symbolic. It doesn't matter what the crossword is printed on or how you write the logic puzzle: It's the information which is important.

Under these general headings one can divide puzzles into sub-categories based on how much information they provide to the solver. Some puzzles provide the solver with all the information required. An anagram, for instance, includes all the letters of a message; the solver's task is to determine the correct arrangement. Most physical puzzles provide full information: There is nothing concealed in a jigsaw puzzle.

Conversely, there are puzzles which require the solver to *extract* some information from what is provided in order to reach a solution. Logic puzzles are the classic example. You know who lives in the green house and who owns a pet dog, and from that you have to deduce who lives in the white house with a cockatoo. Riddles hide their solutions behind a screen of analogies, puns, and allusive language. In some electronic puzzles, the information to be extracted is the actual rules of the game. The ultimate deductive puzzle would be something which appears to be ordinary text, but which conceals a puzzle: The existence of the puzzle itself is the information to be deduced.

And finally, there are puzzles which depend on the solver having certain knowledge. Crossword puzzles, trivia

questions, and acrostics all depend on what the solver knows. If you don't know that a five-letter word for "Pyramid Master" is MARSH, you're never going to solve the crossword. A combination lock could be considered a physical puzzle with a very obscure "answer" known only to a few solvers.

Puzzle Pieces

Now that we've discussed classes of puzzles, let's look at what goes into them. Any puzzle, even a physical one, is ultimately about *information.* Solving a puzzle is simply the process of discovering one or more particular data. In a crossword puzzle, the required information is the words defined by the clues. For a metal link puzzle the information is the correct sequence of moves to unlock them.

Reaching the solution is complicated because information in a puzzle is *encoded* in various ways. Physical puzzles do this through the actual material structure of the puzzle object. Word games do it by definitions, anagrams, or grammar. Trivia puzzles encode the information in clues. Logic puzzles encode the information in a process of deduction.

Every genuine puzzle must provide enough information to allow its solution. For trivia-type puzzles that means the knowledge must be available to at least the majority of solvers. Exactly how much information is given determines the difficulty. (If there is no reasonable chance that a solver can know the answer, the puzzle becomes more like a code or a combination lock.)

A puzzle can present information in more than one way. Many puzzles have two or more *channels* of information. Jigsaw puzzles typically have two "channels" of information -- the picture and the shapes of the pieces. The hardest jigsaws are blank, or have pictures which provide very little information to the solver. Crossword puzzles have two channels, as well -- the definitions and the grid of intersecting words.

Despite these underlying similarities, puzzles take on their wide variety of forms based on what the information is for the solution, and how that information is encoded. Some typical encodings include: numbers, letters, words, grammar, text, mathematical knowledge, astronomical knowledge, ancient alphabets, codes, Towers of Hanoi-style algorithms, visual images, historical knowledge, logic, and time.

Making A Puzzle

To create a puzzle for a roleplaying game adventure, it's necessary to distinguish between information available to the *characters* and that available to the *players* -- for instance, the features of any in-game physical item is likely to be character-only, while rules info and the result of skill rolls is player-only. Obviously, GMs should lean toward information which is easily presented to the players, since it's ultimately their brains which have to solve the puzzle.

Here are the steps a GM should follow when creating a puzzle:

Intent: What is the intent of the puzzle's creator? Is the creator a comic-book mad villain who wants to test the heroes? A prisoner trying to get a message out without alerting his captors? Or an ancient cult protecting its treasure with information only initiates would know? There are also *inadvertent* puzzles, where the creator wasn't actually trying to invent a puzzle -- as with any kind of crime-solving mystery, where the "creator" was doing his best to make sure the puzzle never gets solved at all!

Solution: What is the information required to solve the puzzle? For a number puzzle, the solution is the answer to a problem. For trivia, the solution is an obscure fact. A puzzle can combine elements -- using two trivia-question dates in a math problem, for instance. Keep in mind that the solution information must be available to the puzzle creators: if you're making up an ancient Mayan tomb-trap puzzle, it can't hinge on the date of Queen Victoria's birth. The information must also be available to the *players*, either as presented in the adventure or through character skill rolls.

Encoding: How is the information encoded? Again, it can be physical or symbolic. If symbolic it can use any of the types described in the first part of this article. The GM should also decide how many coding channels the puzzle uses.

Puzzles can combine physical and symbolic channels -- arranging puzzle pieces gives the clues to a number puzzle, which in turn opens a combination lock. As already noted, encoding methods should be feasible for the puzzle creators (a prisoner of war could write a letter full of cryptic clues, but probably couldn't build a mechanical puzzle). Channels should also be suitable for communicating to the RPG *players*. This means that GMs should favor symbolic puzzles, if only because they can be written or drawn, instead of made.

Modes of Failure: What happens if the solver fails? For most ordinary puzzles that simply means the solver has to give up or peek at the answers. But if the puzzle lets the adventurers into a tomb, or holds the secret to a sinister plot which will destroy Cosmopolis, the consequences of failure are more serious. Which means the GM may wish to build in a "back door" or some way for player-characters to get around the puzzle if they truly cannot solve it. The workaround shouldn't be easy; solving the puzzle must always be preferable. (Though there is some cathartic comedy value in watching someone solve a complex puzzle by the method Alexander used on the Gordian knot.)

And then there are puzzles which have a higher price for failure: deathtraps in the Indiana Jones mold, which drop spikes or release huge rolling stone balls if the puzzle is solved incorrectly. Those give the characters and players the immediate puzzle of finding a way to survive!

Example Puzzles

In order to illustrate these methods, let's look at some sample puzzles.

The Secret of the Temple

Lost in the jungles of Belize sits the temple of Kukulcan. Beneath the pyramid is a mystic item of great power, guarded by a puzzle trap. The treasure chamber door is marked with the Mayan symbol for the planet Mars. Surrounding it are four panels bearing numbers -- 5, 108, 512, and 687. Pressing any panel but the correct one releases a catch in the ceiling above, showering intruders with basketball-sized rocks. *(The puzzle was designed to keep all but educated astronomer-priests out of the chamber. The information encoded is Mars's orbital period, 687 days. For the Mayans who built it, this is a trivia question. Modern explorers also have to figure out the Mayan number system, making it a code as well.)*

The Ransom Note

Millionaire adventurer Clive Trent has been kidnapped, and the gangsters have forced him to write his own ransom note. He sends his equally adventurous wife and kids this: "Obey listed directions. Cash only -- at least million in notes. Extreme secrecy. Have all funds tonight. Then wait orders." *(The encoded information is "Old coal mine, shaft Two." Clive uses a fairly simple word game, using the first letters of the words in his message to spell out his real message. This is an example of a puzzle creator with very limited resources, who wants the puzzle solved. Sylvia Trent and the twins quickly proceed to the mine with a sack full of gas grenades and an iced bottle of champagne for Clive.)*

The Inquisitor's Ultimatum

Egad! That super-fiend the Inquisitor has carved one of his crazed conundrums into the courthouse steps: "WHOSON DCA." What can it mean? *(The encoded information is "First National," which is the bank the Inquisitor is planning to rob next. It's encoded with a combination trivia and word game: "WHOSON" is actually "Who's On," as in the classic Abbot and Costello routine "Who's On First?" DCA is the three-letter code for Reagan National Airport in Washington -- formerly known simply as National. Hence "First National." Yes, it's crazy, but so is the Inquisitor. He's half-hoping his arch-enemy Mr. Justice can solve the puzzle.)*

Appendix Z

Decanic Focusers
for *GURPS Cabal*

by William J. Keith

Do you play a **GURPS Cabal** game, or otherwise use Hermetic correspondences? Don't want to flip through a chapter of material to work out what your spell could use in the way of decans, constellations, and planets? The chart below lists the Colleges with their decans and a portable, inexpensive object designed to pack in the decanic energies. Each provides exactly +4 in decanic, zodiacal, and planetary correspondences for that College, and is guaranteed to provide no opposing correspondences. (The new *Fourth Edition* Weather College is assigned to Sahu, and the unassociated decans are listed separately.) The +4 is a "lowest common denominator" chosen for low expense and ease of construction. If a player attempts to add further modifiers, carefully check the total astrological modifiers already in use.

Any Cabalist who specializes in spells of a given College could carry such a thing around. Some of them might even become standard items in a Hermetic magician's toolkit. Creative or rich Cabalists can also "upgrade" them: for example, the pendant for Charchnoumis could switch the sphinx figure to gray-lacquered wood, hang from a silver chain and add several moonstones around the edge, for a total of +5. Kurtaêl's charm is particularly amenable to this; necromancy is apparently easy to enhance.

In a non-Hermetic system, these weird trinkets can add flavor to enchantments or wizardly accoutrements. They might even be *unique* objects intimately connected to arcane energies.

College	Decan	Object	Common Name
Air	Isrö	An aspen wand tipped with blue chalcedony, sporting eagle feathers attached by tin wire.	Wand of Raphael
Animal	Charchnoumis	A hazelwood pendant in the shape of a wheel, lacquered dark blood-red and inset with a silver sphinx, set about with small red bloodstones.	Animal magnet
Body Control	Bianakith	A palm-sized elmwood disc bearing an ivory miniature of a starfish. The disc is hooped in steel and set with aquamarines.	Grasp of Mihal
Communication and Empathy	Naôth	A V-frame of copper, wound across with piano wire. Attached to one leg is a brass statuette of an elephant; to the other, an emerald figurine of a swan.	Naôthic antenna
Earth	Ieropaêl	A dark brown orb of smoky quartz hooped in cut slate.	Orb of Uriel
Enchantment	Kumeatêl	A rose-colored silk cord with 13 little charms of lionheads carved from carnelian dangling from it.	Magesmith's bracelet
Fire	Eneuth	A primitive athame with an obsidian blade; the guard is iron, and the handle is ironwood set with a dark red fire opal. A blue-lacquered horse adorns the	Michaelite Blade

		pommel.	
Food	Atrax	A fairly large orange pentacle pendant carries four items in its bottom four points: a peridot, an opal, a sapphire figurine of a dove, and an aluminum representation of a lamp.	Hunger's Bane
Gate	Iudal	Two keys of juniper wood dangling from an amber ring, inset with bits of alexandrite.	Peter's Keys
Healing	Phthenoth	A Greek cross; one branch is steel, the other alder wood, both suitably colored crimson. The steel branch bears engravings of fish while the wooden branch is inset with silver and pearl images of cats.	Shaliah's cross
Illusion and Creation	Methiax	A wallet-sized plastic hologram of a fractal, like a Mandelbrot set. The frame is hazelwood, set at the corners with zircons and inlaid with silver.	Faker's Mirror
Knowledge	Sphandôr	A slice of agate set in a hexagonal rowan frame dyed russet-red, overlaying a copper depiction of a lotus.	Lotus lens
Light and Darkness	Phoubêl	A lozenge pendant divided into four alternate black and white squares, made of alternating laurel and hazelwood, framed in applewood painted yellow and set with carnelians, all on a gold chain.	Chessboard of Yelayel
Making and Breaking	Arôtosael	A primitive hammer, its flint head attached by iron bands deliberately reddened with rust to a blue-painted oak handle carved with eagles.	Smiting Hammer
Meta	Alleborith	A pocket-size pyramid of rowan wood lacquered bright azure, with a tiny garnet capstone. The base bears a dark green picture of a goat.	Mana Focus
Mind Control	Ruax	A pair of earrings or bracelet charms: spirals of iron, painted cerulean blue. One holds a piece of amber at its center, the other a dark red ruby.	Enchantress' bangles
Movement	Anatreth	A model of an arrow: feathered with hawk feathers, yew shaft painted violet, arrowhead of lapis lazuli.	Quickening dart
Necromancy	Kurtaêl	A bracelet of rowan lacquered black, set with onyx and jet.	Rainbow's corpse
Plant	Harpax	A useful steel-bladed sickle, its handle set with a small onyx in the shape of a raven. The blade is incised with cheerful designs of ivy strands; the handle is wood from the holly tree, painted forest green.	Harvester's Friend
Protection and Warning	Reêlêd	A chain of stout bronze-colored plastic links (real bronze ages to green, an unfortunate Venus evocation), interwoven with a strip of white Kevlar	Wary Circlet

		and carrying a red-colored pendant or bangle of iron depicting a wolf.	
Sound	Agchoniôn	A green seashell decorated with parrot, peacock and swan feathers, attached with copper wire.	Echo trap
Technology	Ouare	An olive-green plastic gear on a brass axle.	Decanic gear
Water	Saphathoraél	A small blue chalice set with a few teardrop-shaped pearls.	Cup of Gabriel
Weather	Sahu	A model of an arrow: basalt arrowhead attached to a sequoia shaft with animal sinew and real feathers.	Stormwreaker
none known	Akhouiy	A charm bracelet dangling charms of dice, four-leaf clovers, steel fish, and blue-painted tin eagles.	Fortune bracelet
none known	Akton	A palm-sized mirror framed with silver and backed with elderwood painted pale yellow. Its frame is painted maroon and bears images of scorpions carved into pale yellow topaz; its corners are set with pearls.	Poisoned mirror
none known	Alath	A square of tortoiseshell painted deep wine-purple and inset with a brass image of scales.	Foursquare rest
none known	Anostêr	A rowan chalice lacquered dark green and set with an image of a goat's head worked in garnet (orange-yellow spessartite preferred). It bears a green-lacquered rosewood inset of a swan and copper images of scenes or quotations from *The King in Yellow*, Sherlock Holmes' *On the Study of Tobaccos and their Ashes*, or other deliberately-fictional books never written.	Impossibility Chalice
none known	Axiôphêth	A massive necklace of lead chain dangling iron weights as well as yew figures of horses painted indigo.	Chain of Burden
none known	Barsafael	A "U"-shaped amulet carved from the taproot of an acacia and dyed crimson, its ends capped with birchwood bearing likenesses of lions.	Secret Depth
none known	Belbel	Scissors of surgical steel wound about with aged copper bands bearing images of mules and lotuses. One finger hole holds a small green emerald and the other an orange agate.	Painblades
none known	Buldumêch	A charm bracelet sporting cowrie shells, a real silver coin, a sapphire, and a gold bangle.	Sugar Daddy
none known	Hephesimereth	A black ebony box set with an onyx, containing some small dead batteries and ashes, wired shut with purple-covered wire.	Box of Pointless
none known	Marderô	The canton of a U.S. flag (the azure part	Fightin'

		flecked with white five-pointed stars), pinned with a brass Soviet hammer-and-sickle pin, any red scraped off.	Words
none known	Nefthada	A strip of satin dyed bright green, a topaz carving of a scorpion and a blue jade figure of an eagle pinned to it.	Immortal instant
none known	Tepsisem	A ribbon of scarlet velvet bound about the sandalwood handle of an iron (not steel) athame set with a ruby.	Entropy blade

Adventure Seeds

The Collector of Mysteries: the PCs come across twelve peculiar objects set apart from the rest of the magical treasure trove. Trained Cabalists can quickly identify them as focusing the decans without known Colleges. So is this a completist's storage room, or had the previous owner identified some use for them?

The Death-Dealer: Just how much can the Kurtaêl charm be upgraded? A room can be paneled in ebony, cypress, rowan, and yew, the latter all painted black; wall space filled with figurines of rats, crows, ravens, and magpies; barred shut with ribs from a mule, magically significant points decked with onyx and jet. If a few of these ingredients are chosen with a careful eye to quality and rarity, this sanctum could be thrumming with necromantic energies to the tune of a +15 bonus to necromantic spells before modifiers from the Laws of Sympathy, mana level, and distance. Prisoners physically in this forsaken chamber can abandon much hope of successfully resisting the necromancer's power. Of course, assuming the PCs rescue their friend before the astrologically optimal moment for the dark rite, it would be a darned shame to destroy such an obviously valuable piece of magical equipment . . .

"I'm Not Annoying; It's You Who're Annoyed!"

A few weeks ago I started a new job that I am completely unable to describe in a barrage of fluffy bunny lovefest compliments, owing solely -- I assure my humorless corporate masters -- to the reams of nondisclosure agreements I was forced to sign.

During the training process of this job, I may or may not have encountered a fellow trainee who I may or may not have wanted to tie to a set of railroad tracks, twirling my mustache as I turned the crank on the player piano to go faster and consulted my train timetable schedule. Such a person, if he or she existed, might have possessed certain characteristics that could be described as annoying to the extreme.

So these thoughts that I may or may not have had let me to wonder: What is it in a group of characters (we're talking PCs here) that makes a character annoying? Or, to put it another way, where is the line between an interesting character (albeit one with quirks or flaws that might at times seem annoying) and an annoying one?

For example, both Spock (from the *Star Trek* universe) and Jar Jar Binks (from a movie whose title was inspired by the *Star Wars* film phenomenon from several decades ago) both possess traits that could be considered "annoying." The former is humorless and enjoys quoting mathematical precision to a seemingly unlimited number of decimal places, while the latter sucks away valuable photons from the universe to enable its projection upon the retinas of a humanity that has known little but ultimate suffering since the expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

But can we analyze these details further and decide what makes a character more firmly on the "Spock" side of the equation rather than the "Jar Jar" side? From a gaming point of view, what can we do to make sure that our characters (whether they belong to the players or the GM) are interesting and enjoyed, even if they *do* possess some traits that are designed to be irksome or annoying?

Well, I've given it some thought (of course . . . this would be a pretty lame column if it were nothing but an elaborate rhetorical question), and he's what I came up with:

Interesting characters are still interesting even without their annoyances. In other words, if the character didn't have those quirks, is there still a character? Consider Spock: If you took away the humorlessness and the tendency for a droning precision, he's *still* an interesting character; he has a conflict with his human and alien selves, he's got cool powers, and he has personality quirks that aren't annoying (curiosity, group compassion, and so on). Compare this with characters that are, in hindsight, more annoying than not. <koff>JarJar<koff> If you took away the aspects that are annoying, would there be any character left? Or would the character merely take up space in the scene, like a lifeless scarecrow? Really, annoyance is a spice, not a main course; in the same way that you'd never eat a bowl of salt & pepper straight, neither should the annoying aspects of a character be the sole defining aspects of the "meal."

Interesting characters give just enough of their "annoying" tendencies to paint a picture of being annoying, rather than being consistently so. As an example, I once played a fast-talking wise-cracking Corax named Jack in a live-action *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* game. (The Corax are the wiry bird-men shapechangers who love shiny things and . . . well, talk a lot.) Now, it'd be possible to play this character as entirely annoying: Talk over other people, make jokes *constantly,* and so on. But what I did, instead, was merely create the impression that I did so. Among other tricks, I memorized an introductory blurb, which I used whenever meeting someone new: "Jack Papadopoulos, Jack 'Bird-on-a-Wire' Papadopoulos. Jack is fine, 'Bird-on-a-Wire' is fine. Papadopoulos is a bit of a mouthful, but if you're happy with it, I'm fine with it, too. How can I help you?" (I'd say this as fast as possible . . . usually taking five to six seconds.) Usually that introduction was enough to give an idea of what my character was like, even when he *wasn't* acting like that. Again, looking at our two prime examples: Spock could certainly be *more* annoying; he usually only misinterprets humor and/or provides unnecessary mathematical precision once or twice an episode. Jar Jar, meanwhile, filled almost every frame of his outing in *Episode I: Make Checks Payable to "George . . ."* with enough annoyances that he left little to the imagination.

The more active an annoyance is, the more annoying it is. Consider that most of Spock's tendencies were *reactive;*

that is, they were done in response to something else: Someone asks for statistics, he gives lots of statistics; someone makes a joke, he reacts with incomprehension to that joke.

Now, consider that annoying person you know . . . or, again, Jar Jar. Does he offer his pointless/slightly amusing/gross anecdotes without prompting? Is he clumsy, lecherous, or violent in such a way that he will be annoying even left to his own devices, with no way to stop him? If a character has an "uncontrollable" modifier somewhere near that annoying disadvantage, it's probably going to be a *lot* more annoying.

Finally, it's all in the actor and the audience. It's been said that a good actor can read the back of a cereal box and bring about true emotion. The same is true with players acting as another character; some players can take the most annoying-sounding concept and make it "work." (Consider how annoying the notion of playing a Wookie sounds on paper: You can't communicate with anyone else except maybe one other character, and your voice -- if done correctly -- has many of the same tonal qualities of a fork on a chalkboard. But lots of gaming groups have a blast with Wookie PCs, so who cares how it sounds in theory?) Likewise, some players can take the most seemingly innocuous quirk and turn it into a game-stopping affair. Remember: If the *players* are having fun, then it doesn't matter how annoyed the *characters* are. And if the players aren't enjoying themselves as much as they could be, maybe a group powwow is necessary to see if some aspects of the character can't be redirected or toned down.

Seen from a certain angle, we probably all have idiosyncratic tendencies that can be called "annoying" by someone else. But, unlike people we meet in the real world, characters in a gaming group often have a choice about how annoying they'll be. And finding the right balance between "quirky" and "downright annoying" can be the difference between "Live long and prosper" and "Die, Jar Jar, *die!*"

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Pick

Questers of the Middle Realms

by Tim Gray

Published by Silver Branch Games

72-page b&w PDF, $8.00; Print-on-demand book, $17.95

"Comedy is hard." Comedy is even harder when the audience takes the subject terribly seriously. Ask about roleplaying games played for laughs and the list will probably be countable on one cartoon character's hand: *Ghostbusters. Paranoia. TOON.* Other contenders failed because, well, comedy is hard. It's difficult to sustain a humor premise without falling into the traps of repetition, tangency, obscure in-jokes or laziness, a truth relevant to any media. How does *Questers of the Middle Realms* fare in such a challenging domain?

"This game is written as a somewhat tongue-in-cheek reworking of common fantasy elements, poking affectionate fun at the conventions and stylings of fantasy games. Especially That One." That's the first sentence of the book, and writer/designer Tim Gray makes it very plain where he wants this game to go. You don't have to look for internal logic, or depth of detail in character or setting, or even originality. Your mission is to assemble your group of wildly disparate characters with no particular justification in being together (let alone not killing each other) and tear off on quests in search of fortune, fame and more fortune. You will meet dread villains, horrible monsters in ill-reasoned habitats, weird peoples from faroff lands and other species, and triumph! We hope.

The game runs on Chad Underkoffler's PDQ System, originally developed for *Dead Inside* and extended for *Truth & Justice.* Players of those games will have no trouble sliding over to *Questers'* fantasy theme, but the engine is simple enough to be picked up by the rawest recruit in minutes. A character is defined by his qualities, a list of traits that mark out the character's talents, skills and flaws. There is no preset list of qualities -- each player makes up what he needs, from "Freakishly Strong" to "Fine Food and Drink" to "Wallflower." (Many examples throughout the book provide fodder for the less-creative player.) Qualities are then ranked on a scale which gives the typical target number against which the character will succeed and the die roll modifier for cases when dice are, er, rolled. Familiarity with a homeland or levels of membership in an organization are common qualities. Each character also needs a virtue and a vice, behavior aspects with will help guide the player in the game (and tip the narrator for when to offer rewards).

To make it a fantasy game, you need fantasy races and you need magic. *Questers* offers the usual array of races with the advertised tongue-in-cheek twist. The book begins to blossom here as a Pratchett-esque voice begins to sneak in and around the rules. (I won't spoil why hoblings are so popular. Please pass the salt.) Races have their qualities, of course, some of which can be applied to dice rolls, some which can be "downshifted" to let you do something racially cool now but then take a back seat later, and some which are just there for flavor. Don't go looking too closely for mechanical balance here, since the mission is to be colorful and distinct.

It's not a fantasy game without a bit of magic, and *Questers* offers up three styles: miracles (for the religious types), thaumaturgy (for the scientific spell-slinger), and mysticism (for those with the power within). Parallels to certain character classes from That Other Game are inevitable and deserved. Each style is its own quality, of course, and the potency of the spells you can cast is related to the rank of that quality (as listed in a table). There are no spell lists; the caster must describe the desired effect and how he goes about it. (A wise cleric, mage, or mystic will start recording his own repertoire of spells.)

The resolution rules come forward from other PDQ games: roll 2d6, apply relevant modifiers for your qualities and beat a target number or the other guy's roll. Bonuses are awarded for colorful or clever play; penalties can be assessed

for being dull (or "lame-ass," to use the system's definition). Fortune points can be earned through play which amuses and advances the story; they can be spent to improve actions or saved to improve qualities (including the all-important levels in organizations).

Doesn't sound very funny so far, does it? A little bit of joking in the races, and that's all. But the races are a part of the world of Median, and of the continent of Ludor where the players begin. A one-page map frames the sights of Ludor, from the great desert of Ar-Karap to Yrisiriel, the ancient forest home of the elves. The text expands on these descriptions, enough to work with but not enough to start justifying splatbooks. Likewise the world is full of gods, some petty, some mighty, some obscure, and few defined in the text. It falls to the GM and players to create the roll of the gods for their own version of the world. These can be as serious as those of Hickman's and Weis' Krynn, or as whimsical as those of Pratchett's Discworld, or as weird as the gods of Laws' Mad Lands. Pleasing your gods earns you favor with them, and the possibility that they will help move the story in a direction to your liking. The other players have gods too, though, and don't think they won't use them. And of course, there are monsters, beasts, and other animals. *Questers* provides a just-the-right-length section of monsters and descriptions, with ample fiends to fill young minds with thoughts of adventure (or nightmares).

The book is very cleanly presented and well-organized, with diverting snippets of line art lending variety to the pages. I'm very fond of Sergio Caridad Barreiro's cover, featuring all the things you want on the front of a fantasy game book: a diverse crew of heroes in dire peril, loot, magical foes and beasts, loot, and a judicious amount of leg. And loot. I'm sure it's no accident that the bag of treasure is the object closest to the viewer.

Is it funny? Yes. I've carefully refrained from spilling the beans in any detail, but Gray infuses the book with a dry wit and a sensibility that comes from growing up in the land that invented modern epic fantasy. (Revisit the name of the desert mentioned above for a concrete example.) The author wisely doesn't overplay this, resisting the impulse to substitute his own japes for the likely-better ones the players will build. And he leaves plenty of room for that building to occur. Bravo for creating a game world that's likable, amusing, and open for expansion. But here's the dirty little secret: You don't have to play for laughs. It works at that level, of course, but if you just need a fantasy game system that plays easily, encourages broad characterization, and doesn't bog down in details, pick up *Questers of the Middle Realms.* It's a fun game, a fun read, and a bargain too.

Bob is credited as a playtester/peer reviewer in this product.

--Bob Portnell

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Pick

Descent: Journeys into the Dark

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Designed by Kevin Wilson with Darrell Hardy

Cover by Jesper Ejsing

Illustrated by Jesper Ejsing, Lou Frank, & John Goodenough

Full-Color Boxed Game (see components, below); $79.95

Last year's *[Doom: the Boardgame](#)* was a big box of fun, delivering gun-toting, chainsaw-swinging, demon-blasting game play. In sending UAC marines through the corridors and rooms of the Mars base, it emulated the play, the desperation, and the action of the godfather of all first-person shooters. It did all this in easy-to-play fashion at the heart of which lay clever dice mechanics that handled range, damage, ammunition use, and more in one clear, simple dice roll.

Now those same mechanics are back, not in another sci-fi shoot 'em up, but another genre altogether -- classic dungeon-delving fantasy. So instead of a dungeon crawl with guns -- arguably what *Doom: The Board Game* is -- you get a dungeon crawl in true, sword-swinging, spell-slinging fashion. *Descent: Journeys in the Dark* is *Doom: The Board Game's* bigger sister. Much bigger sister. The 10-lb. box contains more components, more options, more monsters, more characters, and more action. All of which are delivered in full color, barring the miniatures -- and you can paint those.

Designed for two to five players, one of whom takes the Overlord role, the background to *Descent* is simple. Heroic adventurers delve into the caverns and corridors below, battling Beastmen, Skeletons, Dragons, Demons, and more, aiming to recover ancient magics and mighty relics that will aid them in the defeat of dark powers and evil masters.

The players have 20 heroes to choose from, who use melee, ranged, and spell attacks to defeat their foes. Arrayed against them are 12 different monster types controlled by the Overlord, all of which can be scaled in terms of power and capabilities according to the number of players. In addition the Overlord has his own deck of cards from which he can trigger events, trigger traps, and spawn yet more monsters.

To get started, players randomly select a hero card. Besides name and picture, each card gives the hero's ratings for Maximum Wound, Maximum Fatigue, Base Armor, and Speed, plus three bonus dice spread between his Melee, Ranged and Magic Traits. He also has a special ability and begins the game with three skill cards, either Fighting, Subterfuge, or Wizardry. A number indicates how many conquest tokens are lost when the hero is killed. Finally, he needs to buy equipment.

So the Orcish Bogren the Shadow has 8 Maximum Wounds, 4 Maximum Fatigue, 1 Armor, and 5 Speed. He has two bonus dice in Ranged, one in Magic, and his special ability enables him to strike out of line of sight to inflict +2 damage. He draws one Fighting skill card (for example, "Parry," which would give him +1 Armor against melee attacks) and two Subterfuge cards (such as "Marksman," which gives +3 range with Ranged or Magic attacks, and "Rapid fire," which lets him make an additional Ranged attack by spending Fatigue). Finally Bogren is worth two conquest tokens.

Meanwhile the Overlord prepares the quest, laying out the maps, and reading any required cards, creatures, and tokens. Although the heroes know the dungeon layout, they do not know what they will find there. The Quest Guide gives nine quests that increase in complexity until a great evil is found and the world saved.

Each quest should also indicate the initial number of Conquest tokens held by the players at the start. Only the first quest, "Into the Dark," gives this figure, and not in the Quest Guide, but the ***Rules of Play.*** So we increased the initial Conquest tokens by one for each quest. Conquest tokens represent how well the heroes are doing and are gained for activating Glyphs of Transport that can take the heroes back to town (where they can buy equipment), opening chests, killing big monsters, and completing other tasks. They are lost when a hero is killed or the Overlord draws the last of his Overlord cards. If the Overlord reduces the number of Conquest tokens to zero, he wins; if not and the heroes get through the quest, they win.

Each round of play consists of all the heroes taking their turn, followed by the Overlord. On his turn, a player refreshes the cards for any items exhausted last turn, decides which equipment to use on that turn, and then takes an action. He can Run twice his speed in squares, but not attack; he can Advance, moving as far as his speed and then make an attack during this movement; or he can Battle, staying put and making two attacks. Alternatively he can Ready himself, either moving or making a single attack and then giving an Order. Aim enables a hero to re-roll any ranged attack, Dodge forces a monster to re-roll its attack dice, Guard allows the hero to interrupt the Overlord's turn and make an attack, or Rest restores lost fatigue.

On his turn the Overlord collects Threat tokens (one per hero), draws cards from his deck, spawns new monsters, and then activates monsters to attack the heroes with. To use any card the Overlord must pay the cost in Threat tokens. The cards come in four varieties. Event cards activate under various conditions, for example "Rage" lets a monster attack twice. Trap cards work similarly, "Spiked Pit" causing the floor to open up under a hero when he moves into an open space. Spawn cards let the Overlord bring new monsters into the fray, though only once per turn. Finally power grants the Overlord very powerful permanent abilities, for example, "Doom" gives every monster an extra die when they attack.

Just as in ***Doom: The Board Game,*** the dice in ***Descent*** come in several colors and one throw handles a single attack. Different dice combinations represent various methods of attack -- melee, attack, and magic -- with markings on the dice indicating damage done, range for distance attacks, and if the attack is a miss or not. Unlike ***Doom: The Board Game*** there is no ammunition component, so this is not represented. Instead the dice are marked with little lightning flashes or Surge symbols. These are more prolific on the black power dice which a hero gains from his traits. For every two or three Surge symbols rolled in an attack, a hero gains a bonus to the attack. For example Bogren attacks with his crossbow, rolling one blue, one green, and two power dice gained from his Ranged trait. The result is 3 range, 3 damage, and 3 Surge. His player can increase the damage with two Surge or the range for three. He can use as many of these as he has Surge marks. By spending Fatigue, a hero can gain extra movement or more Power dice.

Armor of course deducts from damage done, and once wounds are reduced to zero a hero or monster is dead. In addition to the standard attributes -- Wounds, Fatigue, Armor, and Speed -- monsters have their own special abilities; for example, "Pierce" ignores armor, "Poison" inflicts wounds that require healing twice, and "Fear" forces an attacker to expand Surge before he can attack.

Play in ***Descent*** progresses easily and quickly. The heroes battle monsters, open chests, grab treasure in the form of coinage and artifacts, and so on. Complete enough quests and he can gain training tokens that increase a trait by one. These are also available for sale. The Overlord has a lot to handle, but also the fun of unleashing hordes of miniatures on the heroes and watching their faces drop as he does so. Yet as tough as the challenge appears, it manages to be both relatively easy to overcome and give a sense of achievement when the heroes manage to do so.

If ***Descent: Journeys in the Dark*** has any problem it lies in the components. Not in the quality, which is excellent, but in the quantity. There are too many. It not only takes a while to separate everything out, but also to set a game up. In fact it takes too long to set a game up, and this is only compounded by the inadequacy of the packaging. Given that ***Descent*** has hundreds of components, how many ziplock bags are included in the box?

One.

Which can only be described as pathetic. If I spend $80 on a board game, I do not want to provide my own packaging. Letting them slosh around between the cardboard dividers not only increases the chance of them becoming damaged, it also makes them difficult to locate during play.

This problem aside, *Descent: Journeys in the Dark* is physically impressive, as well as attractive and easy to handle. It is a more complex game than *Doom: The Board Game* because it has to take in a more detailed genre, but it is actually easier to play because almost every gamer is familiar with it. Above all, *Descent* is fun, simple to play, has both replay value and the components to design your own quests. If *Doom: The Board Game* delivered with every desperate pound, *Descent: Journeys in the Dark* delivers double that.

--Matthew Pook

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Components: 11" Square Full Color Rule Book, 11" Square Full Color Quest Guide Book, 20 Hero Cards, 20 Tan Colored Hero Figures, 39 Tan Colored Monster Figures, 21 Red Colored Master Monster Figures, 12 Dice (1 Blue Ranged Combat, 1 Red Melee Combat, 1 White Magic Combat, 2 Green Extra Damage, 2 Yellow Extra Range, & 5 Black Power Dice), 180 Full Color Cards (24 Monster Reference, 36 Overlord, 12 Subterfuge Skill, 12 Fighting Skill, 12 Wizardry Skill, 24 Town Store, 22 Copper Treasure, 18 Silver Treasure, 16 Gold Treasure, & 4 Relic Cards), 1 Compass Rose Token, 1 Town Marker, 61 Map Pieces (10 Room, 25 Corridor, 6 Intersection, & 20 Dead End Pieces), 10 Door Markers (7 Normal & 3 Rune-Locked Doors), 10 Plastic Door Stands, 49 Prop Markers (23 Obstacle, 10 Encounter, 10 Glyph, & 6 Staircase Markers), 55 Wound Tokens, 24 Fatigue Tokens, 52 Money Tokens, 16 Hero Order Tokens (4 Aim, 4 Dodge, 4 Guard, & 4 Rest Tokens), 32 Threat Tokens, 24 Conquest Tokens, 1 Breath Template, 55 Effect Tokens (12 Web Markers, 14 Stun Tokens, 13 Burn Tokens, 16 Poison Tokens), 39 Treasure Markers (9 Healing Potion, 9 Vitality Potion, 9 Money, 8 Chest, & 4 Relic Markers), 4 Hero Turn Tokens, 12 Training Tokens (4 Melee, 4 Ranged, & 4 Magic Training Markers), & 6 Miscellaneous Markers (1 Boggs the Rat, 1 Kata the Ferret, 1 Mata the Ferret, 1 Pico the Empos, 1 Skye the Falcon, & 1 Monkey Marker)

The Oak Street Club

for *GURPS*

by Mark Gellis

In an unremarkable small town, a suburb of an equally unremarkable city in Michigan, one will find Oak Street. Oak Street is also unremarkable, except for the celebrity who lives in the ranch house at number 441. And the celebrity is not really all that remarkable, either, being a celebrity only because he writes books and sometimes does interviews on talk shows. He is a pleasant fellow in his early sixties who mows his lawn every Tuesday and helps out at the local library book sale every November.

Most people would be surprised to learn that he secretly leads a team of superhuman crime fighters.

The term "superhuman" would probably give pause to the people involved. None of them would consider themselves superhuman, although each of them has a supernatural gift, a *power*. They would be less surprised by the title "crime fighter," although it conjures mental images of people like Batman and the Avengers. They do fight crime. Specifically, they fight crime that has been committed by unusual people. On occasion, they even fight crime that has been committed by unusual things.

Dr. Joseph Eisen, psychologist and psychiatrist, spent 20 years teaching psychology and psychiatric medicine at one of the large state universities in Michigan. Towards the end of his career, he published a self-help book based on his theories about some of the more common forms of mental illness. It was an immediate success and prompted a contract that involved other books and lecture tours.

After a few years, with enough money in the bank and enough money coming in regularly from royalties that he would never have to work again, he retired, and dedicated himself to his other passion.

Dr. Eisen had long suspected that supernatural powers existed. He always got a tingle around certain people, and in certain places, and was not surprised, if he did a little research, that they were often associated with strange things in their communities.

Eisen was too good a scientist to let hope or hunch overpower his demand for scientific rigor. Nor did he think anyone would believe him without irrefutable proof. Whenever he was asked about the paranormal, as he sometimes was during his lecture tours, he never denied his interest in the subject, but also made it very clear that the difference between real science and "ghost stories" was, in a word, evidence. He often referred to himself as a hopeful skeptic, saying "I hope we will someday have evidence; however, until we do, no amount of hope can justify calling these things science."

But now, at least, he could afford to indulge his hobby. He spent years happily reading obscure books, visiting haunted houses, meeting with others interested in the occult, and so on. His wife, a retired nurse, was not entirely enthusiastic about his new passion, but accepted it with a smile, saying it was cheaper than a sports car and certainly preferable to him having an affair.

Despite his hope, Eisen never abandoned his habit of scientific thinking. He had known for a long time that most strange occurrences were either coincidence or deliberate fraud. This had some benefits. One is that Eisen developed a reputation among those interested in the strange and occult as someone who wanted to believe but who refused to be fooled. People trusted him. On the few occasions when he did encounter something he could not explain, people knew it was probably the real deal. Skeptics refused to believe no matter what, and even Eisen had to admit that the few truly haunted houses he had found had not been willing to give him irrefutable evidence. In time, however, he knew, the evidence would be found.

When Eisen finally got his evidence, he did not even have to go looking for it. It was right in his own backyard, so to speak, and it came to him.

Donna Lewison, a young art teacher Eisen had met on occasion when he came to talk at the local high school about the connections between art and psychology, called him one day, hysterical, saying that everything she was touching was crumbling to dust. She had first seen her ability at work when a boyfriend had called her to break up. At first, she had been heartbroken and furious. Then she had been terrified; her cell phone had gotten warm and then simply disintegrated in her hand.

When she came to his house, she had a plastic bag full of dust exactly the same color as what was left of her cell phone, which looked as if it had been soaked in acid. And as he looked at her, he felt the telltale tingle -- something about Donna was extraordinary. In any event, she was either telling him the truth or she badly needed his help in an entirely different capacity.

Using hypnosis, Eisen was able to recreate the conditions that led to the appearance of Donna's powers and watched with amazement as a new cell phone also disintegrated. He then tested her powers on other objects from metal spoons to flowers. Nothing was immune to her ability. All crumbled to dust.

Eisen and Donna have not been able to determine, so far, why her powers manifested at this particular time. (It was not, after all, the first time she had been angry at a young man. Or, as Donna will sometimes say after yet another failed relationship, "Yeah, I sure know how to pick 'em, don't I?") The next step, however, was to teach Donna how to control her powers. Eisen had never done anything like this, of course, but using hypnosis and other forms of therapy, and learning through trial and error, he was able to show Donna how to use her abilities and how to avoid using them by accident.

It was during one of these sessions that Eisen and Donna realized her ability was not simply limited to destroying matter; she could control molecular structures and cause solid objects to change shape. So far, her ability is limited to manufactured chemical materials, such as paints and plastics, but in time she may be able to bend other forms of matter to her will.

Donna asked that he keep her ability secret, and he agreed, on the condition that he was allowed to document his research and eventually publish it. And now, with proof that the uncanny really existed, he redoubled his efforts. Slowly, he found others, made contact, and asked them to meet with him on a regular basis to exchange information, share experiences, and so on.

Eisen has sometimes wondered why so few have found any proof of the uncanny. But perhaps, he reasons, it is not so strange. The uncanny is not only rare, but also unpredictable enough to frustrate most attempts at scientific investigation. In addition, those with strange powers often kept their abilities secret because they feared being ostracized or worse. And most people do not expect to experience the uncanny, so if they do, they come up with other explanations for what they have encountered. As Eisen says, "The deadliest phrase in our business is 'I'm sure there is a rational explanation for this.'" He believes he and his colleagues have experienced a kind of mental paradigm shift. Somehow, they have learned how and where to look for the uncanny, so they have less trouble seeing it for what it is and understanding it. (In game terms, this is not the same as the Illuminated advantage; it is simply an explanation of why relatively few people in the campaign setting believe in the paranormal.)

He also learned that some of the rare, gifted people with unusual powers were using them to commit crimes. And there were hints that there were other things out there, too, inhuman things, some of them monstrously evil. They needed to be stopped. And so he asked people if they would be interested not only in investigating the uncanny but also in investigating crimes and helping the police track down certain special criminals. Some declined, but others said they would be glad to help.

And so, on a warm September evening, Dr. Joseph Eisen sat down at his dining room table with his wife and four extraordinary people. He jokingly apologized that his house was not exactly stately Wayne Manor, and Donna replied that it was still a pretty exclusive club. "Yes," he said, "The Oak Street Club." The name stuck.

The Oak Street Club divides its time between investigating the uncanny and looking into mysteries using their powers and then passing on information to the police or a federal agency like the FBI. (Eisen has a pretty good reputation with the police because of his combined expertise in psychiatric medicine and his well-known debunking of a number of phony haunted houses and other so-called supernatural events.) Sometimes, they end up doing both -- in proving that a house really is haunted, for example, it is sometimes necessary to discover and expose the truth about the crime or tragedy that led it to be haunted in the first place.

They have discovered some unusual things in the last few years. Eisen has found four houses that he believes are genuinely haunted. He has also met at least 11 people who have truly extraordinary powers, including a man who really can find water with old-fashioned dowsing and an old blind woman who can handle objects for a few minutes and know things about the people who have owned them. And a rapist who could take control of someone else's body with his mind. And a murderer who could make victims hallucinate. All of this goes into his notes, notes for a book he will write someday, a book he believes will be the most important thing he has ever written.

All five members have learned how to use firearms, and have appropriate permits. None of them want to have to shoot anyone, but they have dealt with enough bad people over the last few years to understand that going armed is sometimes a necessity. Even if they are not expecting serious trouble, at least one of them will usually have a pistol.

Eisen is not sure, but he thinks other groups like his own may be operating in different parts of the United States and around the world. He is pretty sure there is one group in New England and another in either Memphis or New Orleans. A third group appears to be operating out of Vienna. His attempts to contact these groups have not yet been successful, which makes him wonder if they have something to hide.

He also thinks he has found a pair of vampires. Two tall, beautiful men, one blonde, and one with dark hair, who look at each other like lovers and who move like music, and they have been seen in six different cities over the years, and wherever they go, people disappear. But he is not sure what they are. Not yet.

These are the current members of the Oak Street Club . . .

Dr. Joseph Eisen   146 points

ST 9 [-10] **DX** 10 [0] **IQ** 13 [60] **HT** 10 [0]

BL 16 [0] HP 9 [0] Will 13 [0] Per 13 [0] FP 10 [0] Basic Speed: 5 [0]

Cultural Familiarities: Western [0]

Languages: English (native) [0]; German (accented) [4]

Advantages: Contact (Police detective, Effective skill 15-, Somewhat reliable, Available 9-) [2]; Detect (Strange Powers; Vague, -50%, Psionic, -10%) [12]; Independent Income [5]; Reputation 1 (Famous author and expert, everyone, sometimes recognized) [3]; Reputation 2 (Sympathetic but rigorous investigator of the occult and uncanny, small group, sometimes recognized) [1]; Status 1 [0]*; Wealth (Very Wealthy) [30]

* One free level for Very Wealthy

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Physician) [-5]; Dependent (Spouse; 75% as powerful; Ally; Loved one; 15-) [-3]*; Obsession (To learn everything he can about those with strange powers, 12-) [-10]; Reluctant Killer [-5]; Secret (Strange Powers) [-10]

* Eisen's wife, a retired nurse, usually accompanies him on his investigations. She has no unusual powers and so is not described in detail in this article; GMs may assume that she has ST 9, DX 10, IQ 12, HT 10, shares her husband's wealth and social status, has any appropriate IQ-based skills such as First Aid at 12-, and any appropriate DX-based skills such as Guns (Pistol) or Driving (Automobile) or at 10-. A generous GM may also assume she has Common

Sense, allowing her to advise her husband and his friends against doing anything dangerously stupid.

Quirks: Always approaches the uncanny with scientific rigor [-1]; Likes to come up with catchy ways of explaining important concepts [-1]; Likes cats [-1]

Skills: Administration-12 [1]; Area Knowledge (Michigan)-13 [1]; Computer Operation-13 [1]; Criminology-13 [4]; Diplomacy-13 [4]; Driving (Automobile)-10 [2]; First Aid-13 [1]; Guns (Pistol)-10 [1]; Hypnotism-15 [12]; Leadership-12 [1]; Law (American Criminal)-11 [1]; Literature-13 [4]; Occultism-14 [4]; Pharmacy (Synthetic)-13 [4]; Physician-13 [4]; Psychology-15 [12]; Public Speaking-13 [2]; Research-14 [4]; Teaching-14 [4]; Writing-15 [8]

Jeffrey Anderson *141 points*

Jeffrey Anderson can start fires with his mind. He also gets mystic visions when he stares into a fire for long enough, and can touch burnt objects and learn their histories. He works as an arson investigator for an insurance company. An old buddy of his is an ATF agent and the two keep in touch, and share "war stories" about various cases. Sometimes, he has his friend look into things for him, but he knows not to push their friendship too far.

ST 11 [10] **DX** 11 [20] **IQ** 11 [20] **HT** 10 [0]

BL 24 [0] HP 11 [0] Will 12 [5] Per 12 [5] FP 10 [0] Basic Speed: 6 [15]

Cultural Familiarities: Western [0]

Languages: English (native) [0]; Spanish (accented) [4]

Advantages: Contact (ATF agent, Effective skill 15-, Somewhat reliable, Available 9-) [2]; Create Fire 1 (Psionic, -10%) [9]; Oracle (Visions appear after looking at flames or embers; Psionic, -10%) [14], Psychometry (Only for events related to fire, -40%; Psionic, -10%) [10]

Disadvantages: Reluctant Killer [-5]; Secret (Strange Powers) [-10]

Quirks: Loves jazz [-1]

Skills: Acting-11 [2]; Administration-10 [1]; Area Knowledge (Michigan)-11 [1]; Brawling-12 [2]; Computer Operation-11 [1]; Criminology-11 [4]; Detect Lies-12 [8]; Driving (Automobile)-11 [2]; Expert (Arson)-12 [8]; Forensics-10 [2], Guns (Pistol)-12 [2]; Intimidation-11 [2]; Observation-11 [2]; Search-12 [4]; Streetwise-11 [2]

Dr. Kyle Barrett *126 points*

Dr. Kyle Barrett is a man who can get birds to do his bidding. He can also see and hear what birds see and hear. He works as a veterinarian. An expert on birds and the diseases that can kill them, he has a good working relationship with a physician at the CDC whose specialty is bird-borne diseases like West Nile Virus and Avian Flu. He can, if necessary, check into reports of epidemics, strange outbreaks, etc.

ST 10 [0] **DX** 10 [0] **IQ** 12 [40] **HT** 10 [0]

BL 20 [0] HP 10 [0] Will 12 [0] Per 12 [0] FP 10 [0] Basic Speed: 5 [0]

Cultural Familiarities: Western [0]

Languages: English (native) [0]

Advantages: Animal Empathy [5]; Contact (CDC Physician, Effective skill 15-, Somewhat reliable, Available 9-) [2];

Mind Control (Birds only, -50%; Psionic, -10%) [20], Mind Reading (Sensory, +20%; Birds only; -50%; Psionic, -10%) [15]; Status 1 [5]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10]

Disadvantages: Reluctant Killer [-5]; Secret (Strange Powers) [-10]

Quirks: Enjoys hiking and camping [-1]; Loves birds [-1]

Skills: Administration-11 [1]; Area Knowledge (Michigan)-12 [1]; Biology (Zoology)-13 [8]; Computer Operation-12 [1]; Diagnosis-12 [4]; Driving (Automobile)-10 [2]; Expert (Birds)-13 [8]; First Aid-12 [1]; Guns (Pistol)-10 [1]; Hiking-11 [2]; Mimicry (Bird Calls)-12 [4]; Photography-12 [2]; Poisons-11 [2]; Survival (Woodlands)-11 [1]; Veterinary-13 [8]

Matt Dolan   *122 points*

Matt is a carpenter and electrician. He is a bit on the rough side, but basically a decent guy who has little patience with real criminals. He can control electricity with his mind and even deliver electrical shocks to people or things if he can touch them. He has a good relationship with his parish priest, who often answers questions about strange occurrences, occultism, and the like.

ST 11 [10] **DX** 11 [20] **IQ** 11 [20] **HT** 10 [0]

BL 20 [0] HP 10 [0] Will 11 [0] Per 11 [0] FP 10 [0] Basic Speed: 5.25 [0]

Cultural Familiarities: Western [0]

Languages: English (native) [0]

Advantages: Contact (Priest, Effective skill 15-, Somewhat reliable, Available 9-) [2]; Burning Attack 2 (Surge, +20%; Melee attack, C-range only, -30%; Psionic, -10%) [8]; Control Electricity 1 (Psionic, -10%) [18]; DR 3 (Vs. electricity only, -40%) [12]

Disadvantages: Reluctant Killer [-5]; Secret (Strange Powers) [-10]

Quirks: Avid reader [-1]; Devout Catholic [-1]

Skills: Area Knowledge (Michigan)-11 [1]; Boating (Motorboat)-11 [2]; Brawling-11 [1]; Carousing-11 [4]; Carpentry-13 [4]; Computer Operation-11 [1]; Driving (Automobile)-11 [2], Driving (Heavy Wheeled)-10 [1]; Electrician-13 [8], Expert (Military Science)-11 [4]; Forced Entry-11 [1]; Guns (Pistol)-11 [1]; Guns (Rifle)-12 [2]; History (19th Century American)-10 [2]; Lockpicking-11 [2]; Mechanic (Automobile)-10 [1]; Occultism-11 [2]; Stealth-11 [2]; Streetwise-11 [2]; Survival (Woodlands)-11 [2]; Theology (Christian)-10 [2]; Tracking-11 [2]

Total Points: 122

Donna Lewison   *125 points*

Donna Lewison is a woman who can make things turn to dust by touching them. This is really only one part of her real ability, which is to control the molecular structure of solid matter. She works as a high school art teacher and painter. She has a fairly extensive knowledge of painting and sculpture, and she is friends with the curator of a museum in Detroit; questions about strange artifacts, missing pieces of art, and the like can be directed here.

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 11 [10]

BL 16 [0] HP 9 [0] Will 11 [0] Per 11 [0] FP 11 [0] Basic Speed: 5.5 [0]

Cultural Familiarities: Western [0]

Languages: English (native) [0]; French (accented) [4]

Advantages: Contact (Museum curator, Effective skill 15-, Somewhat reliable, Available 9-) [2]; Control Plastics 1 (Ranged, +40%; Psionic, -10%) [26]; Corrosion Attack 2 (Melee attack, C-range only, -30%; Psionic, -10%) [12]; Fashion Sense [5]

Disadvantages: Reluctant Killer [-5]; Secret (Strange Powers) [-10]

Quirk: Likes flamboyant clothing [-1]; Not the sharpest knife in the drawer when it comes to choosing boyfriends [-1]

Skills: Acting-11 [2]; Area Knowledge (Michigan)-11 [1]; Artist (Painting)-13 [12]; Computer Operation-12 [2]; Connoisseur (Visual Arts)-12 [4]; Current Affairs (Headline News)-12 [2]; Current Affairs (High Culture)-12 [2]; Driving (Automobile)-11 [2]; Expert (Visual Arts)-12 [8]; Guns (Pistol)-11 [1]; Judo-11 [4]; Occultism-10 [1]; Research-12 [4]; Teaching-12 [4]; Writing-12 [4]

Using The Oak Street Club In A Campaign

The Oak Street Club presumes a world where both hauntings and psychic abilities are real, but rare. Perhaps one person in 10,000 has some kind of supernatural ability and perhaps one house in 10,000 is actually haunted (and the haunting might be caused by something other than a ghost). Genuine monsters such as werewolves and vampires, if they exist, are both very rare and very careful to keep their existence secret. This is not a world in which Four Color supers exist . . . or if it is, their activities are covert ("Supers in Black" rather than "Supers in Spandex").

The Oak Street Club operates primarily in Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana, although they occasionally investigate things in other areas, simply because they are private citizens with a limited budget. (Even Eisen cannot afford to fly five or six people around the country, pay their bills, and the like on a regular basis.) They usually do their investigating on weekends and in the evenings, driving to the location and doing what they can in a day or two, or using vacation or sick days to extend their visits. Long drives, of course, provide good opportunities for side adventures (or real adventures disguised as side adventures) and roleplaying. To be fair, a GM should try to design the adventures so that the PCs do not have to worry too much about making a choice between saving the day and losing their jobs. By the same token, the time constraints under which the members of the Oak Street Club must operate can be used to create tension and a sense of realism. Of course, the Oak Street Club could be based almost anywhere in America or Canada; GMs should feel free to alter the setting of the campaign as necessary.

All five characters have been designed with Psionic-based powers so that a campaign can be developed with a world where the only powers are psionic, but a GM can modify this as needed if it is desirable to have a wider range of sources for abilities (e.g., Jeffrey Anderson might have Elemental powers rather than Psionic). The existence of haunted houses suggests that there may also be Spirit-based or Magic-based powers, but hauntings might just as easily be explained as manifestations of psychic energies.

There are many possibilities for gaming in a world like this. The first is to treat the Oak Street Club as pre-generated characters and use their adventures as the center of the campaign. This might be a good option for a GM who wishes to run demo games at conventions.

The next option is for player characters to be other members of the Oak Street Club; in this situation, they may replace some or all of the characters who have been described in this article. Characters should be built with between 100 and 150 points, and spend less than 50 points on their special abilities. The inclusion of a contact is not a requirement, but low-level super-powered individuals probably need some outside assistance once in a while to cover abilities or areas of knowledge that they do not have. Player characters should buy Eisen as an ally, but other members of the Oak Street Club only need to be purchased as allies when they are NPCs who are also fairly regular partners on their missions.

Finally, the Oak Street Club might simply be part of the background of a campaign. They can serve as contacts, allies, or the like for the PCs. This could be useful whether the player characters are mundane adventurers, people with their own psychic or supernatural powers, or visitors from another world, time, or dimension.

The Oak Street Club is, of course, a group of amateurs, rather than professional crime fighters or adventurers. They live in apartments (except for Eisen, who has a very nice four-bedroom ranch house in an upscale neighborhood), have regular day jobs, and so on. All of them live within an hour's drive of Eisen's house, so it does not take very long for them to assemble for a mission, but they are not always instantly available. And their powers, while beyond those of ordinary people, are fairly limited. In fact, the members of the Oak Street Club were deliberately designed, in part, to demonstrate how *GURPS* can handle low-powered superheroes.

Despite their limitations, they are quite capable amateur adventurers. It would probably be a bad idea for any of these characters to try to tackle a villain of the caliber of like Dr. Octopus or the Joker, but there is no need to make their adversaries incompetent. The members of the Oak Street Club have a unique advantage when dealing with supernatural threats. As they are themselves superhuman, they have no trouble believing in the uncanny. And, as a team, they are far more powerful than any one individual operating alone. Between the five of them, they have a wide array of skills, abilities, and contacts. They can handle some genuinely tough opponents, if they are smart and careful.

A typical challenge for the Oak Street Club would be a single criminal, or a small gang, perhaps with special powers, or a monster. A serial killer who destroys crime scenes with fire (perhaps because he is a werewolf) is a good option, as is a drug dealer trying to expand his territory, a murderer who knows exactly why a particular house is haunted and wants to make sure no one else figures it out (or who fakes a haunting to keep people away from something he has hidden there), or some ruthless individual exploiting a child, possibly their own, who has a special talent.

Two other, and possibly related, opportunities for campaigns are worth mentioning. First, one may assume that the world in which the Oak Street Club exists is part of the *Infinite Worlds* setting. A campaign might involve the Oak Street Club somehow stumbling onto an operation managed by Homeline or Centrum. Second, the Oak Street Club might investigate something connected to the Cabal. This could easily be played in a number of different ways. The Oak Street Club might be the heroes, seeking out the truth about some mysterious happenings, and gradually learning that it is part of a vast occult or interdimensional conspiracy. Or, possibly, the heroes are members of the Cabal, working to foil the machinations of one of the more sinister Grand Masters, or deal with an outbreak of Things Man Was Not Meant To Know. Gradually, they realize they are also the target of an investigation by the Oak Street Club. Now, they can either try to keep the Oak Street Club from learning the truth about them or join forces with them to defeat a common enemy.

Manfred

for *GURPS*

by Joe Taylor

"All beasts are happy, for when they die, their souls are soon dissolved in elements; but mine must live still to be plagued in hell."
-- Dr. John Faustus

Little is known about Manfred's background before he joined the Ravenstadt Monastery in 1333. It seems as though he had been educated by the Church as a young man and had become a monk to continue a life of contemplation and study. Located by Schwerzebronn Lake, on the present-day border of Germany and Austria, the Ravenstadt Monastery offered him isolation from worldly evils.

Brother Manfred was as devout as he was scholarly, and the other monks began to see him as an example of perfect piety. Manfred grew to like this admiration and fell victim to his own pride. Proud of his learning and believing himself incorruptible, he began to study blasphemous tomes and forbidden writings. At first, Manfred had thought that by cultivating a better understanding of evil, he could help his fellow man resist temptation; however, as he delved deeper into the occult, everything else ceased to matter. When the abbot of the monastery finally learned of Manfreds heretical studies and confronted him, Manfred killed him. By that time, Brother Manfreds personal magnetism had already entranced the other monks and most willingly followed him down his evil path; those who wouldn't were murdered.

As far as the outside world knew, Ravenstadt was still a house of God, but within its walls, Manfred began teaching his fellow monks new and unspeakable rites. In 1336, under his direction, they began to reconstruct the monastery's chapel to redirect the architecture's spiritual focus. The project would take them years to complete, during which time the monks kidnapped victims from the neighboring village for sacrifice and use in orgiastic ceremonies. The stats below represent Manfred at this point, with his monks as Allies and the monastery as a base of operations.

Manfred (circa 1336)   *234 points*

Attributes: **ST** 11 [10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 16 [120]; **HT** 12 [20]
Dmg 1d-1/1d+1 [0]; BL 24 [0]; HP 11 [0]; Will 18 [10]; Per 16 [0]; FP 12 [0].
Basic Speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.

Social Background

TL: 3.
CF: Western [0].
Languages: Old German [0]; Arabic: Spoken (Broken)/Written (Accented) [3]; French (Native) [6]; Greek: Spoken (Broken)/Written (Native) [4]; Hebrew: Spoken (None)/Written (Accented) [2]; Latin (Accented) [6].

Advantages

Ally Group (50 Ravenstadt monks, 12 or less, Minions) [30]; Charisma 1 [5]; Claim to Hospitality (churches, other monasteries) [2]; Clerical Investment [5]; Talent (Smoother Operator) 1 [15].

Disadvantages

Curious [-5]; Overconfidence [-10]; Megalomania [-10]; Obsession (gain arcane/occult knowledge) [-10]; Secret (Satanic Practices) [-20]; Wealth (Poor) [-15].
Quirks: Bibliophile; Delusion (I am not corrupt); Proud [-3].

Skills (all at TL 3)

Architecture-15 [1]; Area Knowledge (Europe)-16 [1]; Artist (Illumination)-14 [1]; Detect Lies-16* [4]; Expert Skill (Natural Philosophy)-13 [1]; Expert Skill-13 (Thanatology)-14 [2]; Gardening-16 [1]; Hidden Lore (Demon Lore)-16 [2]; Intimidation-17* [1]; Knot-Tying-12 [2]; Knife-13 [4]; Law (Christian Cannon)-16 [4]; Leadership-18** [2]; Literature-15 [2]; Occultism-17 [4]; Professional Skill (Bookmaking)-15 [1]; Public Speaking-18** [2]; Religious Ritual (Christian)-16 [4]; Religious Ritual (Satanic)-15 [2]; Research-17 [4]; Theology (Christian)-16 [4].

*Includes +1 from Smooth Operator
** Includes +1 from Charisma and +1 from Smooth Operator

Encountered

Encountering Manfred at this point in his diabolical career would likely be the result of a group outsiders showing up without any clue that he represents a danger. Monasteries are (usually) places where travelers might find temporary refuge; would such weary travelers recognize that anything is amiss until it is too late? PCs might wander into the village of Ravenstadt thinking it will just be a stop along the way until they hear of missing townfolk or rumors of the dark rites performed at the monastery. A different way to get Manfred and his monks into an adventure would be if the PCs are agents of the Church or some other authority, and they are sent to investigate reports of Satanic practices at Ravenstadt.

How Manfred behaves towards characters depends entirely on what he knows about them and their situation. If they are only passing through the area and will be missed if they disappear, he will endeavor to keep them unsuspecting and get them on their way without incident. Even if he intends them harm, he will keep up his charade until his victims can be caught off-guard (usually in their sleep). If the PCs begin to learn about what is really going on at the monastery, or if it seems like they mean to stay a while, Manfred will have his minions deal with them. Although the monks might be able to handle a villager or lone traveler, they are not great fighters and would use traps, deception, and (if all else failed) sheer numbers against wary opponents. In the final weeks of his reconstruction of the monastery, however, Manfred will not take any chances and try to eliminate any outsider who shows up in the area.

Selling Your Soul on a Buyer's Market

The monks of Ravenstadt were unable to escape God's judgment, which came upon them in 1341 in the form of the Black Plague. During the next few weeks, Manfred worked his followers at a frenzied pace, telling them that he would be able to save them all once the structure was finished. Manfred was already dying of plague when the task was done but he still had strength enough to complete the rite he had been preparing for years. On that night, Manfred offered his soul to the forces of darkness in exchange for long life and great power. In order to seal the deal, he locked his followers in the redesigned chapel and burned the building to the ground.

The fire got out of control (accidentally or on purpose) and destroyed all of Ravenstadt, both the monastery and the adjacent village. Manfreds deal with the devil had worked; he was given 666 years to live, during which time nothing could kill him.

Though he had gained supernaturally long life, Manfred was haunted by nightmares of the fate awaiting him in the afterlife when his soul would eventually be forfeit. He became obsessed with finding a way to cheat the Devil, to somehow keep his soul and never die. The charred remains of Ravenstadt behind him, Manfred spent the next several centuries wandering Europe, searching out arcane knowledge -- a search that continues to this very day.

Manfred (today)   *872 points*

Attributes: ST 11 [10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 16 [120]; **HT** 12 [20]
Dmg 1d-1/1d+1 [0]; BL 24 [0]; HP 15 [8]; Will 18 [10]; Per 16 [0]; FP 12 [0].
Basic Speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].
CF: Western [0], Muslim [1]. Languages: Old German [0]; Arabic (Native) [6]; English (Native) [6]; French (Native) [6]; German (Native) [6]; Greek (Native) [6]; Hebrew (Native) [6]; Italian (Native) [6]; Latin (Native) [6]; Spanish (Native) [6].

Advantages

Alternate Identity [15]; Charisma 1 [5]; Ritual Magery 3 [35]; Regeneration (Fast) [50]; Regrowth [40]; Resistant (Metabolic Hazards) [30]; Talent (Smooth Operator) 1 [15]; Unaging [15]; Unfazeable [15]; Unkillable 2 [100]; Zeroed [10].

Perks: Contract with demon [1].

Disadvantages

Black Penalty 3 [-9]; Callous [-5]; Curious [-5]; Loner [-5]; Obsession (Cheat the Devil and win my soul) [-10]; Overconfidence [-10]; Secret (true nature) [-20].

Quirks: Bibliophile; Dislikes computers; Doodles illuminations in books; Likes to be treated as an authority figure [-4].

Skills (all skills at TL 8 unless otherwise noted)

Acting-15 [1]; Alchemy-16 [8]; Architecture/TL 3-15 [1]; Area Knowledge (Europe)-16 [1]; Artist (Illumination)-14 [1]; Brawling-13 [4]; Connoisseur (Literature)-16 [2]; Connoisseur (Visual Arts)-16 [2]; Connoisseur (Wine)-15 [1]; Cryptography-14 [1]; Detect Lies-16* [4]; Diplomacy-16 [4]; Expert Skill/TL 3 (Natural Philosophy)-13 [1]; Expert Skill-13 (Thanatology)-14 [2]; Fast Talk-15 [1]; Fencing (Rapier)-12 [4]; Forced Entry-14 [8]; Forgery-16 [4]; Gardening-16 [1]; Garrote-14 [8]; Guns (Pistol)-11 [1]; Hidden Lore (Demon Lore)-16 [2]; History (Medieval Europe)-17 [8]; History (Renaissance Europe)-17 [8]; History (Enlightenment Esoteric)-17 [8]; History (Ancient Esoteric)-17 [8]; Intimidation-17* [1]; Knot-Tying-12 [2]; Knife-13 [4]; Law (Christian Cannon)-17 [8]; Leadership-19** [4]; Literature-17 [8]; Merchant (Rare books)-16 [2]; Observation-17 [4]; Occultism-17 [4]; Politics-15 [1]; Professional Skill/TL 3 (Bookmaking)-15 [1]; Psychology-16 [4]; Public Speaking-19** [4]; Religious Ritual (Christian)-16 [4]; Religious Ritual (Satanic)-16 [4]; Research-19 [12]; Search-16 [2]; Smuggling-15 [1]; Stealth-14 [12]; Teaching-16 [2]; Thamatology-18*** [16]; Theology (Christian)-17 [8]; Traps/TL 4-15 [1].

* Includes +1 from Smooth Operator
** Includes +1 from Charisma and +1 from Smooth Operator
*** Includes +3 from Ritual Magery 3.

Spells (Note that when casting spells, Manfred has a 3 Black Penalty)

Core Skill: Ritual Magery (demonic)-22 [20]
Ritual Paths: Air-17 [2]; Animal-16 [1]; Body Control-22 [20]; Communication and Empathy-22 [20]; Earth-17 [2];

Enchantment-20 [12]; Fire-19 [8]; Food-16 [1]; Gate-16 [1]; Healing-16 [1]; Illusion-18 [4]; Knowledge-22 [20]; Light-19 [8]; Making and Breaking-19 [8]; Mind Control-21 [16]; Movement-18 [4]; Necromancy-19 [8]; Plant-16 [1]; Protection and Warning-16 [1]; Sound-16 [1]; Technology-16 [1]; Water-17 [2]; Weather-16 [1].

The above version of Manfred could be used (with little changes) in any setting spanning his 666 years of diabolically-lengthened life. He would be a formidable opponent in any age due to his resilience, but in the present-day he is getting increasingly desperate as his time draws to an end. If the GM feels that this version of Manfred is too underpowered for the campaign, try removing the Black Penalty and raising his skill in individual spells as needed.

Anyone trying to uncover information about Manfred's past will have a difficult time even if they have an idea or two about what he really is. The events at Ravenstadt are recorded in Church records and remembered in local legends. The Catholic Church eventually found out what had been going on in the monastery and Manfred was excommunicated (though no one really thought he was still alive). A new town was built near the ruins of the old, and a new monastery was built as well. An investigator who goes there today can also find out about the history of Ravenstadt, though the local story includes the detail that Manfred's diabolic bargain worked, and he survived. Visitors can even be shown the spot where the Ravenstadt monastery stood, but nothing of the building remains.

Aside from that, there would be very little investigators could uncover about Manfred's history. Only a handful of times has Manfred stayed in one location for more than a few months since his transformation. Any rituals, spells, or experiments he has performed in an effort to cheat the Devil might have been recorded as gruesome crimes or unexplained mysteries.

In addition to long life and immunity from harm, Manfred was rewarded with the ability to wield magic. However, he has found -- much to his dismay -- that demonically assisted magic cannot aid him in his quest; the Devil won't be cheated through his own gifts. Once he realized it was getting harder to cast spells when he wasn't directly calling on demonic aid, he ceased to rely on it as much. He has studied magic enough over the centuries to have a very wide understanding of it, and he easily could have become a true master of the arcane arts if he had dedicated himself to doing so. Instead, he focused on tracking down mystical artifacts and ancient tomes.

Manfred often likes to pose as a learned man in a position of authority such as a schoolmaster, professor, or sometimes even a priest. He only moves into an area if he is after something, so he normally tries to adopt a guise that will allow him to do his work unquestioned or simply keep a low profile. Manfred can be fairly seductive when he wants to be and will often use people to his own ends. He isnt a very physical person and doesn't like to involve himself in violence when he doesn't have to, but he can be extremely dangerous when it suits his needs. He relies on his intelligence most of all, and if he finds himself at a disadvantage hes more likely to run than fight.

He has certainly crossed paths with the Cabal a few times over the years. Though he hasn't earned their outright hostility, there must be some reason why he has never been a member. Whatever Manfred's relationship with the Cabal is, neither side will speak of it.

PCs who investigate or research hidden, arcane lore have a good chance of running into Manfred. He could be a rival who is competing with them over the possession of a particular artifact. Encounters with Manfred don't have to be violent or adversarial, though, especially if the heroes don't realize what he is (and he does not find himself at cross-purposes with them). Manfred could show up in a campaign as the proprietor the local magic shop, a dealer of rare books, or an expert on arcane subjects -- someone the PCs might develop a good relationship with. He could even become a teacher to novice mages, taking a gifted PC under his wing! Of course, Manfred would only build up such a relationship if he intended to use it to his own ends; a group of powerful PCs on his side might be able to help him a good deal.

Finally, Manfred's time is almost up, which means that he will be very active, trying anything he thinks might save him. His activities could very well draw the attention of the PCs, and most of his efforts are likely to involve harm to innocents, perhaps on a mass scale. It's possible that Manfred actually does have an effective plan for keeping the Devil from claiming his soul, and that it's the kind of work that takes centuries to set in motion and perfect . . . and only the PCs stand between him and whatever terrible rite he plans to enact this time.

The Plague Sword

by J. Edward Tremlett

The Red Plague came the day the sword was forged, so long, long ago.

The first swing of the hammer -- slow and deliberate -- rang in time with the first sign of the contagion, well outside the city's strong walls. The second rang in time with the village's warning bell, and the panicked screams of those who heard it. The third accompanied the swift decision to close the city gates, and keep the plague outside.

And each slow, careful strike thereafter was an innocent infected, the pound of a doomed fist on a thick, wooden gate, or an arrow through the chest of a villager determined to climb the high walls.

As it was quenched in water, someone hissed in pain through melting lips. As it was honed on the whetstone, someone killed his entire family rather than watch them liquefy, too. As it was polished and made clean, some pious soul inside the city cried aloud to the gods to spare the pure of heart.

And as its handle was chased, and its edge engraved, the gods replied with silence -- stark and absolute.

By the end of that day, no one outside the city's walls lived. Their skin had sloughed away, leaving bloody red muscle and dead, staring eyes. Even the carrion birds and scavengers shied away from the devastation, sensing danger in the corrupted flesh.

That night, in the temple, the Armorer presented the sword -- his greatest, ever -- to the masters of the order. He had been sequestered in silence, work and prayer that day, and had no idea of the disaster that had taken place.

If he had but known, he would have abandoned the sword as a thing of ill omen. He would have broken it down, burned it, and scattered its ashes. He would have laid aside his hammer and tongs, and joined his brothers in prayer for the souls of the dead.

But it was too late -- the deed was done, and could not be undone. His work could not be unmade. His prayers and blessings could not be revoked.

And the weapon could not lay unused, lest the god of the order take insult, and lay his hand against them.

So the sword was consecrated as a weapon of the order. It was blessed. Spells were intoned to transform its steel into the holy weapon of a god.

And as the head of the order blessed the sword -- tears of grief still streaming from his eyes -- the slow Moon rose as red as blood.

What the Armorer Hath Wrought

The Plague Sword, as this holy weapon has been called, is beautiful, powerful, and cursed. It is an unusually thin two-handed, double-edged sword with an engraved blade. It has an ornate, golden pommel, the handle is chased with polished, red-veined ivory, and the capstone is a small, golden reliquary containing a mummified index finger.

The blade is engraved on both sides. It depicts a scene of the god of the order smiting a horde of demons with a languid wave of his hand. The pommel seamlessly continues the tableau, as three-dimensional demons fall out of the sword, and then across the pommel to their supposed doom. When held aloft at the end of day, the sword drinks in the red sunlight, and the demons seem to writhe in pain.

The weapon has a bad reputation among its order. To remain right with their god, someone from the order *has* to wield the Plague Sword, but possession is a promise of eventual doom. Whenever a new owner is chosen, his brethren silently thank their god that they were spared such a boon, and pity the brother who now must carry it -- now referred to as The Plague Warrior.

Defining the Weapon's Horror

The Plague Sword is designed to be a versitile artifact for a setting, with many options presented for how the weapon works, what its drawbacks are, and what effect it has on those weilding it. The GM is encouraged to pick the options below that sound most interesting and/or work best for the campaign; it may even be possible for the abilities or demands to change or transform . . . perhaps as a result of the PCs' actions!

The Sword may be:

- A Smiter of Evil, doing triple damage to all creatures and NPCs who can be described as evil. It also does normal damage to beings who cannot normally be harmed by melee weapons, such as ghosts, regardless of their alignment.
- A Finder of Evil, pointing its wielder in the general direction of the greatest evil within a days walk. It also moans, as if in pain, when in the presence of an evil creature or NPC.
- A Banisher of Evil, able to make evil NPCs and creatures drop everything and flee for their lives on sight of it being held aloft (and failing an appropriate resistance roll). Those who flee the encounter must flee the sword ever after, even if it is wielded by a different owner.

But the Sword may:

- Require battle every day. If the sword has not been allowed to drink blood before the Sun falls and the moon rises, it will possess the wielder and seek out a fight with the first sentient, living thing it finds, regardless of alignment -- including members of his own party. It will not release control until it has killed.
- Leave the Red Plague behind it. Anywhere the sword goes, there is a chance based on how long the owner stayed that the deadly contagion will appear. (In this case, oddly enough, the wielder of the sword is immune to the plague, and any other disease mundane or magical.)
- Infect the dead. Any demons, devils or evil ethereal creatures slain by the sword have a percentile chance of lingering within it, depending on how powerful they were. They then have a chance to possess any other victims of the sword, springing back to life in stolen flesh anywhere from a few hours to a few weeks after the fight.

Anyone who takes it up might:

- Be constantly tempted towards sin. The sword always whispers that the owner must partake of evil to truly understand it, and fight it. It also negates whatever penalties the owner might suffer for doing so, making it easier to do more, and worse.
- Be possessed of bad fate. In any case where fate, luck, magic, or the will of other gods, rather than skill or ability, determines an outcome, the wielder will suffer. This sometimes leads the owner to make dark bargains with the swords would-be victims, just to even things.
- Demand harsh punishment of sin. If the wielder comes upon a situation that could be described as evil, or in dire violation of the orders ethics, it will possess the wielder, and demand justice. It will not let go until it has seen to the death of those directly responsible, any who might have profited from it, and those who could have done something, but merely accepted it as the way things are.

And the finger came from:

- One of the greatest members of the order, lovingly prized from his corpse as a relic. His finger was placed with the sword in the hopes that it would ameliorate the swords ill omen, and it has, but only to a degree. Should the

reliquary be removed, every demon and devil the plague sword has slain will rise up to take vengeance against its wielder.

- The first wielder of the sword, who fell from grace within a year of taking it up. The finger was put there to remind future owners of the ultimate penalty for such sin, but the sword will bring ruin so long as the finger remains within it. However, if the finger is removed, the swords special abilities also disappear, and the wrath of the order's god falls upon all its members.
- The necromancer who let the Red Plague loose upon the city the day the sword was forged. The first wielder of the sword made certain to kill him, and had the finger placed within the sword as sign to their god that vengeance was carried out. If the finger should be taken out of the sword and handled by bare flesh, the necromancer will possess whoever touches it, and be free to walk the world once more.

Pyramid Review

Halloween Horror (for Call of Cthulhu)

Published by Chaosium, Inc.

Written by Jim Lynch, Oscar Rios, & R.J. Christensen

56-page tapebound b&w softcover; $15

With **Halloween Horror,** Chaosium wastes no time of getting the contents of this supplement. No introduction, no explanation, just straight into the first of a trio of adventures for **Call of Cthulhu.** What you need to know first about this collection is that all three have been deemed the best of the publisher's first Halloween adventure contest run in 2005. Second, they are presented in the publisher's Miskatonic University Library Association monograph format. This means that the book is only available directly from Chaosium and that the production values and layout have been left up to the individual authors.

The first scenario is "Eyes That Should Not See" by Jim Lynch. It begins with a shooting at a small Massachusetts museum, a failed robbery attempt in which the perpetrator is surprisingly resilient. Behind the robbery is a cultist unknowingly being directed by a minor Mythos entity with a hatred of Cthulhu. It so happens that the museum has an exhibit of "Ancient Treasures of the Pacific," and the cultist is directing her minions to steal certain artefacts. Her method of control is novel and might send **Delta Green** devotees in another direction all together. Yet this is not a good scenario, but rather a passable outline that in the hands of a capable Keeper deserves to be something more. Everything necessary to run the scenario is present (though not very well organized), bar a set of example investigators. What you get instead is set of character outlines clearly written for the author's own playing group. Their presence adds nothing to the scenario, and if I can see that, why could not Chaosium? A mere matter of either deleting them or actually giving full investigator write-ups for all four and the error would have been abated. Even so, the scenario shows promise and had it been better organised and fleshed out . . .

The second scenario is by Oscar Rios, who already has a Monograph or two under his belt in the form of **Ripples From Carcosa** and **Tales of Death & Darkness.** "Halloween in Dunwich" is a one-shot that delves into Lovecraft County lore and has the players take the roles of six children, all cousins aged between 11 and 13 years old. Although they are not the younger versions of notable Mythos figures, with one of them being named Edward Derby, they could be. Each Halloween their parents take them to a family party held at Great Grandpa Silas' farm, where there will be holiday fun, games, and treats. For each child, this is the opportunity to escape the "teenage weirdness" of their lives. Unfortunately, a secret long forgotten quite literally comes back to haunt the family and it is up to the young investigators to save the day, or rather the night.

With ghosts, animated scarecrows, and dangerous cornfields, this is the only one of the trio to make use of the Halloween's traditional bogeymen. This and the fact that it is a straightforward affair, makes "Halloween in Dunwich" a little like a *Scooby-Doo* episode. Even so, this is a most enjoyable affair, especially if the fan plays the cast as young versions of Mythos notables.

"Terror at Erne Rock" by R.J. Christensen is the third and last, a classic 1920s set scenario that starts with a Halloween party aboard a private yacht off Nova Scotia. When a sudden and severe storm blows up, the investigators, the guests, and the crew find themselves first shipwrecked and then safe, washed ashore at a malfunctioning Canadian lighthouse. This is where things take a turn for the worse . . . This is a locked room situation in which the investigators are forced to improvise if they are to survive the night. It should play rather well until the players have to sit down and read one of Lovecraft's tale as part of the adventure. Fine for a huge campaign like **Beyond the Mountains of Madness,** but for one scenario?

Of the three scenarios, "Eyes That Should Not See" is suited for any period of the game and is easily added to any campaign, as is "Terror at Erne Rock," although it is firmly set in the game's classic period of the 1920s. Both are suited to less experienced players and investigators.

In truth, there have not been very many scenarios for **Call of Cthulhu** set on Halloween. Pagan Publishing's solo scenario **Alone on Halloween** being one of the few notable examples. And to be fair, **Halloween Terror** only adds one more to that already short list, Oscar Rios' "Halloween in Dunwich." The other scenarios could be set at any time of the year and do not make particular use of the festival to qualify as Halloween-set scenarios. This is not to say that you could not run them on Halloween, but that is the problem with the bulk of the trio here.

Overall, "Halloween in Dunwich" is almost, but not quite worth the price of the supplement -- and that is the fault of the price, not the scenario. Of the other two, "Terror at Erne Rock" is a solid addition to any campaign, while "Eyes That Should Not See" is something for the Keeper to work with. Each one will provide a good evening's worth of play, perhaps even on Halloween, but **Halloween Terror** does not really make as much use of its theme as it should.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Zombie Rally

Published by [Snarling Badger Games](#)

Created by Adam Loper & Peter Spahos

54 black & green cards and rules; $5.95

This has all been a big misunderstanding.

You think of them as evil, watery-eyed, subhuman freaks raised from the grave by some unnamed source of malice, and set to eating the body and/or brains of any hapless passersby they chance across. The zombies, it turns out, are simply exercising, because when you're dead and decaying you need all the workout you can get to stay fit and trim. This shuddering event is known as the *Zombie Rally.*

The object of the game is to be the first zombie to run, shamble, hop, or crawl across the finish line.

Players -- two to six maggot-infested shells can join -- are assigned a hand of cards, and everyone agrees on a number of steps for this race. The more steps, the longer the race, but the default is 30 steps. Someone grabs pencil and paper (backing up a step, someone has to *supply* paper and pencil) and keeps track of everyone's steps and which limbs they retain.

Everyone takes a turn playing or discarding cards. Some are simple movement cards that let you hulk forward one, two, or three hesitant steps, and these are marked beside your name so you know where you stand (or lie) in the race. If you can't get any movement cards, you can discard three non-movements to take a step. Others are attack cards that let you attack your competition. These have a range listed on them, telling you how far from your current position you can reach. If you want to Kick someone, for example, the range is one: You can attack anyone next to you (e.g., both of you are at step seven) in the race and anyone directly in front of (step eight) or behind you (step six). Some of the cards allow you to attack and move at the same time, like Trip-n-Move; its range is only zero (so you have to use it on someone you're neck and rattling neck with), but you force them to lose a turn while advancing a step yourself. The attacks with the best range require you to play two cards in concert. And then there's the dreaded Cartwheel of Carnage . . .

When one of these attacks connects (assuming you don't play a defensive card like Duck), it knocks off some of your valuable, desiccated limbs. Losing arms limits some of your attacks, and losing legs slows you down. You can still use movement cards, but you may not make full use of some, crawling or hopping as you now are. Sooner or later someone drags themselves to the finish line and becomes a ghoul (apparently zombies are happy to have any sort of goal in unlife), leaving the rest to place or show (if the other players still care).

The illustrations are deceptively unpretentious; like Kovalic artwork, you don't realize how hard it must be to make something so simple come out so evocative -- or vice versa. The little zombies suit the tongue-in-cheek (through-the-cheek, out-the-other-side) feel of the game to a T. The graphic design conveys information quickly, and it's one of those rare instances where you would have been willing to see the stats reduced in size just a wee to see a slightly larger picture. The cards are thin things made from whatever that over-thick construction-paper-like stock is called -- if you ever played the first edition of *Give Me the Brain,* you know the stuff. They feel a little too thin but given that play isn't as fast and furious as that game, the problem isn't with the stock's weight but its texture. The cards aren't easy to shuffle and won't be until you've had the chance to handle them quite a bit.

Some games have cards whose effects are negated by other cards, and some get to the point where you can't make any

headway. This isn't one of those games. It's well-balanced as far as the selection is concerned, and while you may be able to, say, reattach a severed limb, that kind of thing doesn't happen very often. Play is quick -- less than half an hour in most cases -- and if you don't want a full evening of racing, it fills the gaps between other games nicely. It's not as good with only two players (why unleash the awesome might of the Cartwheel of Carnage on one dude?), though with two the marathon gets pretty tight. It's hard to get too far out in front, leading to a, uhm . . . dead heat.

A charmer of a game, ***Zombie Rally*** is a simple idea with a coy execution. With an easily customized length and a hungry appetite for both brains and house rules, it satisfies the hunger for a quick repast.

--Andy Vetromile

Dealing With Possession

By Bevan Thomas

In folklore and fiction, few supernatural abilities are as potent as spiritual possession, and few are as feared. The idea of someone nestling in your flesh and using it to work his will upon the world is a terrifying concept. It violates the sanctity of our minds and bodies, reducing individuals to the roles of marionettes dancing on strings, and calls into question some of our most cherished beliefs about identity and free-will.

However, as prominent and effective as spiritual possession is, difficulties can arise if it is employed on a player character in a roleplaying game. Most players are very protective of their characters' volition, even more so than they often are of their characters' health. Many players who would shrug in affable resignation at the maiming and even slaughter of their alter egos would become angry, even furious at the idea of the GM wrenching away control of their characters for even a few moments merely because some upstart demon or sorcerer has decided to ride around in the characters' skin.

Even if the players are willing to accept such actions in principle, they generally become forced by the possession to sit out the session for a while, waiting for the being to either be exorcised or to grow weary of its current habitation. Though this can be acceptable if the possession is a short, too much of it becomes tedious. Fortunately, there are various ways that the GM can get around these problems.

1. The first and by far the easiest option is to simply decide that no PCs would become possessed. This might be because the heroes are protected from such supernatural attacks (perhaps due to a blessing granted to them by a benevolent deity) or simply that the possessors always decide that NPCs would be better targets. Though this option does sidestep the whole issue, many GMs (and some players) would find it too contrived and arbitrary. And, of course, it also robs the PCs of the roleplaying opportunities that being a possessed victim can present.

2. The second option is to allow the player to continue to control his character even while he is possessed. When the character is taken over, the GM provides the player with enough information on the possessor and its goals for the being to be authentically roleplayed. This method allows the player to remain involved with his character despite the presence of another mind, and has the added benefit of helping to keep the possession hidden from the other players (assuming, of course, that the GM wants to keep it hidden). However, it also means that a player is given access to an adversary's background and trusted to play that being to the best of his ability. Though some players are able to handle the responsibility, many are not.

3. A similar method is to allow the player to play his character as usual, though occasionally telling him to take particular actions ("you have an overwhelming compulsion to put the gem in your pocket"). This option keeps the benefits of the previous option, though without its potential flaws. Not only does the player not get access to an NPC's background, he may not even realize himself that his character is possessed (potentially attributing the compulsions to other forms of magical control, or possibly even mental instability). However, this option has its own potential problems. First, it involves forcing players actions when they don't know the cause, which some players would find frustrating in the extreme. Secondly, it assumes that the possession in question is of a subtle nature, with the victim maintaining his own volition for the most part, and only occasionally coming under the control of the possessor. In situations where the possession is of a more blatant nature (such as a complete suppression of the target's personality), another method would be needed.

4. The last possibility is for the GM plays the possession figure as normal, but the player continues to play his character's personality, which is still hanging on deep inside the skull. Possibly the player character perceives himself as being in some location (such as a cold prison cell, an empty mansion, or a mist-shrouded field) or merely as a formless consciousness. Either way, he can communicate with the being that is in possession of his body and can sometimes struggle for dominance (perhaps eventually managing to exorcise his possessor, or at the very least regain access of the body for a few pivotal moments). The advantage of this option is that it grants the player some control over his character, while still keeping the actions of the possessor firmly in the hands of the GM. It also grants the player dramatic roleplaying opportunities as he battles a being for the right to direction his actions. However, it does still leave much of the player character's actions within the complete control of the

GM, and furthermore introduces a new arena of conflict that completely excludes all other player characters (unless they are able to somehow enter the possessed person's mind) and potentially distracts from the larger adventure. Furthermore, as with option three, it presents a very specific interpretation of possession that will be inappropriate for some campaigns.

Ultimately, none of these options are better or worse than any of the others. They each possess their own benefits and potential pitfalls. In the end, the GM needs to ask himself how he intends spiritual possession to be treated in his campaign and how he wishes the players to interact with it. Then he chooses a method accordingly.

Pyramid Review

HorrorClix

Published by [WizKids, Inc.](#)

Designed by Scott Hungerford with Kelly Bonilla, Seth Johnson, Jon Leitheusser, Mike Mulvihill, Matt Robinson, Jordan Weisman, & Brook Willeford

Sculpting by James Carter, Brian Dugas, Jeff Grace, Abe Gusillo, Lukas Hungerford, Joey Locke, Dave Summers, & Drew Williams

Illustrated By David Wahlstrom With Aleksi Briclot & Kieran Yanner

Horrorclix Starter Set: **Six Pre-Painted, Predetermined Figures With Character Cards, Three 3D Objects, 30 By 19½-Inch Double-Sided Full Color Map, 12 Victim Tokens, 12 Plot Twist Cards, 4½ By 7-Inch 50-Page Black & White Rulebook, Two Six-Sided Dice, & One Clix Ring; $14.99**
Horrorclix Booster Pack: **4 Pre-Painted, Random Miniature Game Figures With Four Character Cards, One Plot Twist Card, & One Victim Token; $7.99**

Having run the gamut from [fantasy](#) and [superheroes](#) to [aerial dogfights](#) and [baseball](#) via [big robots](#), WizKids bring the CMG (or Collectible Miniatures Game) format to the horror genre. Actually not the first horror CMG -- that was WizKids' *Creepy Freaks,* a game for a younger audience -- *HorrorClix* is a nastier affair, better suited to more mature players. More slasher flick than supernatural chiller, the game pits bands of monsters, perhaps even cabals of creatures, against each other, each slaying innocent victims to empower themselves. Even as the monster armies fight, others try to rescue these potential victims. Doing so likewise empowers these martyrs, priests, and vampire slayers, preparing them for bigger fights.

As with other WizKids CMGs, *HorrorClix* comes as a Starter Set to which can be added the contents of Booster Packs. The core set consists of 107 figures, of which 23 are single rarity types (Experienced, Unique, or Limited Edition), the rest being divided equally between Rookie, Experienced, or Veteran rarities. The harder the rarity, the more capable and more expensive to play the figure is. The figures also come in seven types. Vampires become more powerful as they feed; werewolves start off in human form and transform into a beast after eating; and zombies can suffer lots of damage and get up to carry on fighting. Occultists use powerful magic or control supernatural servants; slashers get close up and personal; and spirits become solid as the game goes on, but can possess other monsters. Finally, guardians defend the victims from the monsters.

As with other CMGs, each figure has a dial marked with various things. These include name, cabal symbol, set symbol and number, plus an indication of its rarity. Besides its Range value is a stat slot containing values for Attack, Defense, Damage, and Speed. These four will change during play as the combat dial is rotated to reflect damage, healing, or empowering following the saving or slaying of a victim. At the same time they reveal special abilities that are explained on each monster's double-sided card. For example, on the starting side of the Bane Wolf there is only a purple dot for its Transform ability. This tells the player to flip the card to its transform side and also to turn the figure's combat dial to its red starting line. Now the Bane Wolf has a green dot for its Rake ability that allows it to deal

damage to an adjacent monster, and an orange dot for its Tough Pelt that stops some damage.

Not every monster starts out weak and transforms into something stronger; some just start tough and nasty. Others have two starting sides and do not transform. In this case, a player can handle the associated monster in two different ways. For example, the Faithful Priest can be played as either a protective priest or as a more combative man of god. Another symbol that appears in the stat slot is the hourglass. If it appears next to a monster's Speed, it is Immovable; next to its Attack, and the monster is Incapable of acting; and when next to its Defense value, the monster is Intangible, and cannot be attacked.

The Victim Tokens simply depict a genre archetype such as Pizza Guy or Prom Queen, along with their gender and Speed. Cards come in two types: Plot Twist and Subplot. Plot Twists are played whenever a Monster attacks a Victim, and are inspired by various genre clichés. For example, "Unlikely Martyr" saves a Victim, inflicts damage on the attacker, and comes with the quote, "You're going to have to go through me first." Subplot cards grant a player extra Victory Points if the card's conditions are met at game's end. The Subplot cards in the Starter Set either require every victim to die, or all opposing Monsters to die. Each player begins the game with one Subplot card revealed and six different Plot Twist cards kept hidden in the player's crypt.

Finally, there is the double-sided map. One side shows the floor plan of a one-story haunted house, the other a cemetery full of mausoleums. Terrain can be modified with doors, hindrances, and three dimensional terrain pieces. The Starter Set includes two tombstones and a single Tree of the Damned. If a Monster is killed in its shade, the attacking player receives another action.

Game set-up is simple. Players select Monsters up to an agreed build total, usually in multiples of 100. The number of multiples also sets the number of Action Tokens (which have to be supplied) a player receives each turn. Cards are selected and Victims placed on the map's blood spots.

A player's turn consists of four phases: Preview, Suspense, Hunting, and Hourglass. In the Preview phase, any effects outstanding from previous turns or Plot Twist cards are resolved. Things turn nasty in the Suspense phase, the player being allowed to move one Victim, usually away from rival Monsters and towards his own. Of course, another player can interfere with a Plot Twist card.

Monsters act during the Hunting phase. Assigned an Action Token, initially each can either move or perform an attack, either melee or ranged. If a Monster can reach and slay a Victim, it becomes blooded and can Frenzy, now able to move and attack per Action Token. Slaying a Victim is automatic, but resolving an attack on another Monster is merely a matter of rolling the dice and adding the attacker's Attack value. If this beats the target's Defense, damage is inflicted in turns of the Combat Dial. If the stat slot shows three skulls, the Monster is slain. The last phase is Hourglass, in which any Monster that did not act but has Action Tokens still assigned has one removed. Finally, if a Monster has any Hourglass symbols showing, it takes another click of damage.

Action Tokens need to be carefully handled. They must be assigned for a Monster to act, but if it acquires two tokens, the Monster becomes vulnerable. In this state, a Monster cannot act until its tokens are removed through inaction. Further some other Monsters can take advantage of its state to inflict further damage. For example, a Lynch Ghost inflicts penetrating damage on a vulnerable Monster which it cannot counter with any damage reduction abilities. This effect of the Action Tokens also enforces a pattern of moving Monsters on alternate turns.

With play alternating between turns, the objective is simply to get your Monsters blooded or transformed by slaying or saving Victims. Once done, more options open up and the various powers and abilities -- which also include possession, minions, flying, and inflicting insanity -- become available. More figures (from Booster Packs) and players add to this variety. Winning involves scoring points for killing Monsters and meeting the conditions of Subplot cards.

Straight out of the box, *HorrorClix* is a little limited in terms of play, but being a CMG this is no surprise. The only way to get more out of the game is to purchase further Booster Packs, which also enable more players to participate. Yet it is disappointing in several small ways. First, it does not make very much of its source genre, and then really only in the recognition of horror movie conventions on the Plot Twist cards. Second, its treatment of the genre is generic. This is intentional, but it means that the game lacks both a hook and a drive that you would get from playing a

more focused game like [***Zombies!!!***](). Perhaps this will change once ***WizKids*** release the ***Hellboy*** or ***Aliens vs. Predator*** figure sets? Some Cthulhu Mythos figures do appear in the core set, most notably the Great Cthulhu figure (but also the Deep One and the Avatar of Cthulhu), but these are few and far between despite Great Cthulhu featuring heavily on the packaging. Third, although the rules suggest that ***HorrorClix*** can be used to play scenarios, those given in the rules and on the website really only provide limitations on how players can beat each other's monsters up . . . which seems somewhat unimaginative.

Nevertheless, as a horror-themed light skirmish game, ***HorrorClix*** is fun to play. The Action Token mechanics do enforce more tactical play and the various monster powers and abilities are decently handled once they come into play. However, anyone wanting a deeper playing experience will have to look elsewhere, and its treatment of the genre might be too broad for some tastes. ***HorrorClix*** is thus best suited to a less demanding audience or to one wanting a lighter, and lightly themed skirmish game.

--Matthew Pook

Scream of Clio's Nightmares

"Your soul is full of cities with dead names,
And blind-faced, earth-bound gods of bronze and stone
Whose priests and kings and lust-begotten lords
Watch the procession of their thundering hosts,
Or guard relentless fanes with flickering swords
And wizardry of ghosts.

In a strange house I woke; heard overhead
Hastily-thudding feet and a muffled scream . . ."
-- Siegfried Sassoon, "To A Very Wise Man"

Every [Halloween](), Clio, the Muse of History, lies on tenterhooks waiting for the creak of history's hinges swinging. She starts and jumps at every scrape, every scratch, every skitter. All it might take is a sudden thud, or a tinkle of shattered glass, for her to bolt upright and scream for her very soul. Scream, Clio, scream! But those noises remain potential, heard only in the hypnagogic half-space between doze and dream, and Clio's scream lies choking in her throat. Likewise, these four campaign frames are mostly secret histories, where any unusual noises in history's corridor can be explained away -- until the scream breaks out and secrecy is no longer an option. From a whisper to a scream, then, won't you follow us?

" After a space of time had passed, three plagues fell on the Island of Britain, such as none in the islands had ever seen the like of. . . . The second plague was a shriek which came on every May-eve, over every hearth in the Island of Britain. And this went through people's hearts, and so scared them, that the men lost their hue and their strength, and the women their children, and the young men and the maidens lost their senses, and all the animals and trees and the earth and the waters, were left barren."
-- The Tale of Lludd and Llevelys, *Mabinogion,* (Lady Charlotte Guest, trans.)

It was such a shriek, a scream that filled the whole Island of Britain in 70 B.C. Llevelys said it was the noise of two dragons fighting, and that Lludd should open the well at the center of the Island to drown them in mead and slumber. Lludd should never have listened -- he opened the well and the scream of Lloigor poured out and blasted the very walls of the years apart. History itself became a [hollow](), an echoing shaft opening up and bursting through pre-Roman Britain. The shriek had fallen down from the stars, but it vibrated out of harmony with the spheres -- it tilted them from their shells and sent time into discord. The scream was loose -- all across the listening centuries. From the ululations of Pan to the *alala* of the Greek hoplites -- from the howls of Celtic warriors to the Confederates' Rebel yell -- the scream was loose, and fed on the killing it nurtured. It echoed and re-echoed, its resonances reaching back past the "great cry heard in Ramah" and the shout of Gideon, until it would garble and drown the very Words of Creation. Every little "Banzai!" or "Urra!" or "Hoo-ah!" across history mounts up, in a choir of death and chaos. Every battlefield where such calls sound is a little closer to that void in what once was Lludd's green and pleasant kingdom.

This is a cosmic-horror pulp-fantasy **GURPS Time Travel** game with an eon-spanning monster. The feel should be simultaneously high action and ticking doom. The PCs can be anything from clerics of Angerona, Roman goddess of silence, to Victorian magi in the Order of Harpocrates, to silent but deadly SAS commandos killing draconic avatars. Once they hear the scream of Lloigor, they -- the few quiet men -- can ride the waves of sound from deafening battlefield to ritual echo chamber to experimental WWII vortex-artillery installation. (The "how" of it is unimportant.) Every encounter is a noisy one -- banshees, animated Stuka-liches, manticores, screaming skulls -- and the GM should encourage the players to fight in silence (foes regenerate one HP per player word spoken?) to play up the theme.

"There's a mighty bad road from Lynchburg to Danville,
And although he knew this well
He said he'd pull his train on time into Spencer
Or he'd jerk it right square into hell.
When he hit the grade from Lima to Danville

His whistle began to scream;
He was found when she wrecked with his hand on the throttle
Where he'd scalded to death from the steam."
-- Fred Lewey, "The Wreck of the Old 97"

To the Chinese laborers building East, loud whistles scared away the ghosts -- of Indians, settlers, and the laborers themselves. To the Irish laborers building West, the scream of the whistle was the scream of the bean sidhe, the banshee, drawing the dead to her. Both put their will and hexes into the whistles they heard along the soon-to-be transcontinental rails. And in 1869 they met, and the whistles' dissonant screams refracted and shattered the barriers that both had built. The echoes spread, minor chords of spectral sound across the Great Plains and into everywhere the steel rails ran. A secret fraternity of trainmen learned the true map of America, the cutoffs to Hell or the [Rock Candy Mountain](), the staccato codes that sang across the empty miles to their brothers in speed. But the fraternity split, driven apart by the Rail Strike of 1877. Some lost their jobs, and taught their secrets to the "kings of the road," the "gentlemen travelers" who chalked their own hexes and sigils on America's doorways on moonless nights. Not every mad-eyed, grizzled hobo riding the rails was human, after that. Rivalry and fear brought new methods, and new money fed old rivalries. In the first decade of a new century, E.H. Harriman's Southern Pacific (with access to the secrets in Huntington's library and Stanford's university) fights tooth and nail against George Gould's Western Pacific and Missouri Pacific -- and Casey Jones is dead.

This **GURPS Spirits-Steampunk** crossover campaign frame is a standard "secret magic" horror game. The PCs might be train drivers, railroad detectives, etheric ritualist telegraphers, or heroic surveyors and structural engineers straight out of Ayn Rand, battling bandits like Butch Cassidy (who preyed on Harriman trains), revenant Sioux, or hobo druids wandering the rails and playing curses on their banjos. Around them all rise the ghosts -- controlled, compelled, summoned, and banished by the sound of the lonesome whistle. It blows the devil's note, and screams in frequencies only the very gifted -- or the dead -- can hear.

"I went along the road with two friends -- the sun set. Suddenly the sky became blood -- and I felt the breath of sadness, a tearing pain beneath my heart. I stopped -- leaned against the fence -- deathly tired. Clouds dripped reeking blood over the black fjord and city. My friends went on but I just stood trembling with an open wound in my breast, trembling with anxiety -- and I heard the huge endless scream pass through nature."
-- Edvard Munch, undated private journal

In *The Gay Science* of 1882, Nietszche announced that God was dead, but noted that "this prodigious event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men." It reached the eyes of men when Munch's painting debuted in Berlin in 1893, a mute John the Baptist for the Superman. Nietzsche had predicted that the Superman was the bridge to the future -- Munch painted that bridge, and the endless scream that Zarathustra merely spoke. In the elections of July 1893, a candidate few knew (they said he came from Bremen, or from Dresden) entered the Reichstag. His speeches were powerful, although afterward none could recall just what they had heard. Men and women fell to his charisma, committees and chancellors to his ruthlessness. He was unstoppable, this "Adam Schreck," and he soon bent even the Kaiser to his will. By 1913, he had become Chancellor, and readied Germany for total, ruthless war. He was the Superman, beyond Good and Evil, the unborn Alraune, the [Mandrake]() -- and the world waits unknowing for his scream.

The nature of this game depends on when the GM sets it. In the 1890s, it can still be an **Unknown Armies** sort of game, of artistic conspiracies and political machinations -- Munch, perhaps, and his cabal of absinthe-soaked bohemian alchemists against Schreck the New Avatar and his network of spider-vampire agents. (Perhaps Munch's romantic rival Stanislaw Prybyszewski and his Satanic circle make a third faction -- or perhaps Prybyszewski realizes that if God is dead, Satan is likewise dust.) In the prewar era, perhaps it becomes a sort of **GURPS Espionage** or **Black Ops** sort of thing. The Diogenes Club and "M" have to send superspies of their own into Germany to battle the Superman and his minions -- nosferatu, word-born golems, howling werwolves, demonic musicians (Erich Zann?), shrieking monstrosities, and vegetable warriors. Once Schreck takes control in 1913, he launches the Great War, filling Europe with screams and deafening noise, and the campaign becomes more of a dark-horror **GURPS Powers** game. Now fallen angels, dark knights, wonder women, and super-soldiers must battle the spawn of the Man of Terror, and withstand his army's uncanny acoustic weapons, across a plain of sound.

"Ladies and gentlemen. Please do not panic, but scream for your lives! The tingler is loose in this theater, and if you don't scream it may kill you. Scream, scream! Keep screaming, scream for your life!"
-- Dr. Chapin's voiceover narration, *The Tingler* (William Castle, 1959)

You can't believe everything you hear. In fact, before 1877, you couldn't believe anything you heard, because you didn't hear anything. Before Thomas Edison's invention, the Silent Ones could move about between the tones. But recorded sound was different. Sound without mind was immune to the Hushed Lords' spinal magicks and the Words Inaudible. As the phonograph became less than a toy, the Silent Ones lost their hold on their human cattle -- then came radio, and talking pictures. And the humans slithered between their erstwhile masters' talons at an appalling rate. The quiet monsters have prayed to the Noiseless Gods, and infiltrated the dream palaces, and suborned the human leaders in love more with their voices than with freedom. This is their last chance, to replace the ever-noisier squawk of rock and roll, the roar of drag-racing, and the crash-bang of B-pictures, with bland sounds and lullabies. So make some noise, and fight back.

This **GURPS Atomic Horror** campaign frame is frankly surreal, perhaps more suited to **Over the Edge** or similarly bent games. Set in a cinematic 1950s in which the squares want you to "keep it down" and the hepcats want to pump it up, it can be as scary or as silly as you like it. The Silent Ones might be the Gentlemen from *Buffy* or simply silent-movie golems and ghosts -- they may move with the impossible stillness of dream horrors or merely stalk their prey like tigers. Are there tinglers planted in grownups' spines that keep them from really hearing their kids? Are there white-noise tripods floating across Los Angeles or London, washing out the sound of the future? Do the appliances in Mom's amazing new all-electric kitchen hum to each other at night? As long as the central contrast is there, it's your rhythm to riff on.

The Big Reveal

When you think about it, one of the biggest moments of many horror or suspense stories is the Big Reveal -- the point when the clues fall into place and what's really going on is fully revealed. Sure, this is common in other types of tales, but it often takes more importance in the horror/suspense genre, or (for non-horror ongoing campaigns) in horror/suspense tales set elsewhere.

(Sidebar: One problem with an ongoing roleplaying campaign -- which is similar to a trouble faced by ongoing suspenseful television shows -- is that there's a bit more dissonance from the *characters* than there are in horror movies. After all, if the party has business cards that bills the group as Explorers of the Unknown, then there's generally got to be a moment where the unknown becomes known if they're going to collect those fat fees. The mere act that the characters are expecting -- and are, indeed, anticipatory -- of such a moment may help undercut the tension that the gaming group desires. Sure, there's fair bit of playing along that comes with such a campaign -- Why is Agent Mulder going into the underground labyrinth alone again after what happened the last 16 times? -- it's still a problem. Sadly, as you may have noted by the residence of this paragraph in a giant parenthetical aside, it's also a problem that's beyond the scope of this column . . . maybe next Halloween.)

Unfortunately, it's hard to gage how, exactly, to do this. After all, if it's too arbitrary, then the players will go, "What the heck?!" -- "As you're riding in the cab, the driver turns around and reveals himself to be . . . a *vampire!*" If it's too clichéd, then the players will be expecting it. ("<sigh> Okay; we open the spooky-looking final door at the end of the spooky-looking corridor. Gee, could there *possibly* be anything spooky on the other side?") If the revelations are too obvious, then it's either a matter of the players waiting for the shoe to drop. ("Right; there's no garlic or mirrors in the house . . . bring on the vampire.") If the revelations are too cryptic, then -- again -- the players are left to go, "Huh?"

Fortunately, I'm more than willing to share an endless bounty of advice for those willing to keep their hand hovering comfortably over the mouse.

White noise is all-important. This one is mentioned first because so many of the other tips stem from it. Basically, there should be a constant (though not overpowering) supply of "white noise" -- additional information that isn't important to the adventure. This is because the only way to sneak in information that *is* important is for the players to not know immediately that it's so. For example, if the only time you actually speak "in voice" for an NPC is when he turns out to be important, then the fact that you're speaking in voice for the seemingly mundane apartment doorman is a extreme meta-clue to the players that this person is more important than seems obvious. Likewise if you've never described the odor of anything in a scene before until you mention the "scent of bitter almonds," then you're not going to surprise anyone when they learn that the mayor was killed with cyanide gas.

The trick is finding the right balance of white noise to generate. If you'll be injecting an important scent clue at some point in the game, you don't want to describe *every* scent the PCs encounter; the game will take six times as long. But going into more detail than normal about sensory information -- say, one or two non-visual detail every scene -- should give a fair bit of "smokescreen" to the players.

Clues, not sledgehammers. Some pieces of information are more obviously clues than others. For example, mentioning a lack of garlic in a kitchen (presuming it's not a red herring) is a yawner of a clue if it reveals that the chef is a vampire; the "no garlic equals vampire" tidbit is a hoary old cliché. On the other hand, off-handedly mentioning that a vampire chef's offerings are pretty bland and flavorless is quite possibly a *good* clue if it's supposed to lead to the fact that he doesn't use garlic (or other seasonings).

As a sub-tip in the "clues, not sledgehammers" heading, try to think tangentially about the *effects* of the clue you wish to portray. In the previous example, this led to the "bland food = no garlic = vampire" chain. As another example, let's say that you ultimately want to reveal that a major NPC is a time traveler from the future. Now, if they find a newspaper from next Sunday in his room, then they're probably going to figure it out pretty quickly. But if they discover that he's an avid buyer of lottery tickets and gambler on sporting events (and is otherwise a pragmatic and logical person), then the pieces are laid for the future revelation; if the PCs happen to think of making a note of what

events he's betting on, and then follow up by determining the winners, then they'll make their own revelatory moment.

As a final note, one reason for this technique is that it's always easier to give more clues later (if you want the players to figure out What's Going On themselves) than it is to reel back the line and try to make it suspenseful again.

Don't reveal that there's a revelation. The mere act of expecting a revelation is often enough to "spoil" the effect; for example, knowing that there was a twist ending in *The Sixth Sense* enabled me to figure out the twist in about the first 10 minutes. If I hadn't known there was a twist, there's a good chance I would have been surprised. Although sometimes it's difficult or impossible not to create some expectation of a revelation (if someone is mysteriously murdered in a sealed room, then there's the expectation that there will be a solution), many times it is possible to sidestep the issue. For example, if there's a supernatural reason behind a murder, there doesn't need to be any direct clue to the otherworldly nature of the crime, and the PCs may be able to investigate as if it were a "mundane" crime.

Don't be afraid to "lie." In other words, you can mention how something is perceived to be as a "fact" without qualifier. Many GMs will make sure they don't say anything that can be interpreted as a lie, since they fear the players will accuse them of "lying" when the truth is ultimately revealed. However, I personally believe that it is the GM's job to present reality as it appears to the characters. In other words, if the star-lit sky is actually a holographic projection, then they might say something like, "The sky seems to be lit solely by stars." In this case, of course, that "seems" stands out like a sore thumb. No, I think it's better to present the impression that the players of the scene are trying to give, unless the players have reason (active or passive) to know otherwise.

Let's look at an example. Let's say that the heroes are the guests of a mysterious gentlemen who will be ultimately revealed to be a clockwork automaton. Now, during the course of the evening the PCs have occasion to share wine with the stranger. Now, the GM might be tempted to say, "During the festivities you notice that your host never drinks the wine." But that's too much of a red flag. No, I'd modify the hosts actions slightly and go with something like, "During the festivities, the host takes tiny sips of his wine that contrasts with his large frame as he tells you a bit about his estate . . ." After all, the host *could* raise the glass to his lips to continue the charade, even if he can't drink. And the difference between "tiny sips" and "isn't actually drinking" is slight if the heroes don't know to look for it.

Now, this doesn't mean that the PCs should be denied information if there's a chance they could passively detect it, nor should they be thwarted if they try to investigate a possible clue actively. For example, if one of the heroes is a culture or wine expert and would be constantly assessing others' mannerisms while drinking, then he might be entitled to a "passive" observation check to notice that something is amiss. Likewise if another PC believes that there's something odd about the guy and announces that he's examining him closely, then he should definitely get a roll of some sort. But otherwise it's important to lay the seeds for the big revelation early and (somewhat) often, and hiding them behind the language of what the characters presume to perceive is a good technique.

If possible, use breadcrumbs. When leading to a big revelation, it's important to try to lay the trail of breadcrumbs down for the players to follow (if they wish); in most cases, the big reveal happens organically, letting the players figure it out themselves. For example, it would be an interesting revelation if it turned out that the trusted town doctor actually possessed a torture chamber where he carried out unspeakable experiments on his victims; having the PCs stumble across that chamber would be one way of handling the "big reveal." But it can be somehow unsatisfying; the players may not feel like they played any active sort of role in the uncovering. No, what if -- instead -- the heroes learn that the doctor claims to be compassionate and trustworthy sort, even going to far as to provide treatment for patients who can't afford it. The doctor mentions something about one of the pro bono patients passing away, but if the investigators look into the matter with the police they learn the victim is only presumed "missing." (Why does the doctor believe she passed away?) So now the players can follow the breadcrumbs: Do they confront the doctor, try to break into his practice (and discover the chamber), or something else?

Be dispassionate as you can. There's a tendency in some stories to be over the top in presentation of information. This is usually when the GM is excited about getting to reveal something interesting: "You open the closet door and discover . . . the dead body of the *lumberjack!*" And the GM gets this crazy look in his eyes as he says it. Sure, it might be a bit shocking, but might it be made more effective?

Player: "I open the closet door."

GM: "Okay. It's dark in there, but you can make out the muted reflection of a used axe handle."
Player: "Hmm . . . anything unusual about it?"
GM: "Do you try to pick it up?"
Player (hesitantly): " . . . sure."
GM: "Okay; it seems to be stuck."
Player: "I . . . pull harder?"
GM: "Something dislodges from the back of the closet, and there seems to be a large unmoving arm still gripping the axe. Wetness that you presume is blood is trickling lightly from above the part of the arm you can see down toward the hand and axe handle."
Player: " . . . Fudge."

Now (depending on your players) *this* is a big reveal! The dispassionate nature of the revelation forces the players to "connect the dots" themselves, making them an active participant in their own revelation. Likewise the players should feel like they were in complete control of their destiny the whole time; they could have left the closet alone at any point in the scene.

Of course, if the GM decides to follow a dispassionate course, he should be prepared for the players to decide against following the breadcrumbs; that's their right.

There is no good time for the reveal. *The Twilight Zone* has trained us that the twist comes in the last few minutes, but this doesn't need to be the case. The twists in *The Crying Game* and *The Matrix* (not the same twist) come surprisingly early in those movies. If the players get used to the final scene containing the big reveal, then it won't be a surprise anymore when one happens then. Mix it up; consider *starting* the adventure with the twist. ("Okay; as you all reflect on your last mission -- which you, as players, are about to experience -- your first thought of this strange tale is that it remains the only case you have investigated to date where you learned that you had died. But let's start at the beginning . . .")

Rule #0: There are no set-in-stone rules. Like the zeroth Law of Robotics (which always struck me as really darn fishy), this is the ultimate rule for suspense. The reason is simple: If there are must-follow rules, then the players will work out that there are such rules, and be prepared; if the players figure out that, whenever the GM gets especially dispassionate, there's about to be a big revelation, then they'll learn to keep an eye out for those subtle clues. But if the GM mixes it up every so often, then they won't be able to predict when any revelation is coming, setting the stage for all the more effective (and shocking) events:

Player: "Okay; I open the closet door."
GM (jumping up, possibly startling players): "WHAM! A body falls on you; the axe he was holding releases. Make a dodge roll."

Watch the players scramble.

For many GMs (myself included), the big reveal -- whether uncovered by the players or detailed by the GM -- is one of the high points of many adventures. With a bit of forethought, you can make these moments scarily memorable . . . in a *good* way.

--Steven Marsh

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Sydenham

by Paul Drye

Broadly classified as a Hell parallel, Leviathan is much more livable than most of its type. While it's true that the human race has fallen greatly since the Atlantean invasion began 15 years ago, it's holding its own in the highest and driest parts of the world. Extinction is a possibility, but there's every chance this is just a new age of more-restricted human civilization. In large parts of the world, though, humans are thin on the ground, invariably captured slaves being worked to death or forcibly bred with the quasi-human Atlantean (a process that leads to extinction in one generation, since offspring are always Atlanteans themselves). There are very few isolated pockets of humanity.

Last month, the Survey Division stumbled across Sydenham, a small village in New Hampshire which is the only human settlements in New England to avoid conquest. The agents are assigned to make contact and find out if there's anything particularly unusual about the town that has let it survive. Depending on what they find (if anything), the hope is that the information can be passed on to other human remnants throughout the timeline.

It is currently October 1812 on Leviathan. This Earth is on Q6 and is mana-normal. For humans, magic is an esoteric art, but Atlantean technology is based on it, and some areas of the world (particularly the remnant Chinese empire in Thibet) are starting to use it after seeing the Atlanteans in action.

History

Located high in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, Sydenham was once a perfectly typical New England hamlet. On most timelines it was granted to Glyn Henry as a farm, and then gradually grew to about 50 citizens before declining and turning into a ghost town at the turn of the 20th century.

Until 1797, Leviathan's Sydenham was also a small, sleepy town of no interest whatsoever. Two generations of four farming families lived there, with the Henrys being the first and the other three clearing land and setting up not long after. It was mostly isolated from the world, off the dirt road through the White Mountains between the somewhat larger hamlets of Warren and Lincoln. The nearest town of notable size was the county seat of Haverhill, which was a day's journey away.

Since then, however, it has gained the dubious distinction of being one of the few free human settlements in the northern Appalachian Mountains. Hiding from the onslaught of the Atlanteans has worked for the residents for fifteen years, but their existence is precarious.

On Leviathan, the Atlantean onslaught -- though slowed a little by the winter -- swept over in more-inhabited parts of New Hampshire in the early spring of 1798. Sydenham had heard of the distant trouble, but the day before it reached them an observer from Revolutionary France, Dr. Geoffroy St.-Hilaire, arrived in the town in full flight from the latest

attacks. One contributing factor to Sydenham's continuing existence may have been his timely warning, along with his knowledge of the invaders.

Another possibility is that Sydenham had a large measure of luck. The night before the invaders would have reached the town, a timely rainstorm flooded nearby Jackman Brook and erased the turnoff to the settlement on the Lincoln-Warren Road. To the untutored, Atlantean eye the route seemed to run unbroken between the two larger towns, and the brook was too small to swim along, so Sydenham was missed. Given a short respite, the village folk avoided contact with the outside world, and explored only tentatively over the next few days and weeks as the rest of the area was depopulated.

The Atlanteans have bracketed Sydenham with two major underwater settlements. Lake Champlain is 60 miles to the west, while the smaller Lake Winnipesaukee is 40 miles to the southeast. This may also have been a factor in Sydenham's survival, as the former lake is reached from the north via the St. Lawrence, while the other drains south through Massachusetts. Dr. St.-Hilaire often expresses the opinion that two separate armies of Atlanteans are involved, and that Sydenham has fallen between the cracks.

The Town

Sydenham sits at the far end of a mile-long coomb cut into the side of Mt. Moosilauke. This U-shaped valley is another possible reason for the town's long-term survival: the inhabited area is 200 feet below the top of the sheer cliffs on either side, and tell-tale chimney smoke has time to disperse before it rises high enough to be seen.

A stream runs into the valley from high up the side of its far end, running the length of the rounded floor before exiting to the east and joining Jackman Brook. The Henry family farm is at the spot where the water descends in the west, and Glyn set up an undershot water wheel to run a small flour mill.

There are three other families living in the town: the Wheelrights, the Morrises, and the Talbots. A fourth family, the Alfords, settled in town a few years before the Atlantean invasions but their farmhouse is uninhabited and falling down in 1812, making it a likely place to put any visitors.

The other major building in Sydenham is the white Congregationalist church. Optimistically built to seat 40, it is half-empty even when the whole village is there on Sundays. Sydenham has not had a minister since the last one died in 1799, though, and Glyn Henry has taken over the position by common consent.

The Atlanteans

The invaders, properly named the A'Nthleioi, really are former humans, 12,000 years old as a race. When Atlantis fell on Leviathan, as it did on some other timelines, a dubiously fortunate select were offered new life by a coelenterate god of the oceanic abyss. In return, it asked only for their eternal worship. In the millennia since then, the aquatic Atlanteans multiplied and spread throughout all the Earth's deep oceans, particularly in the colder temperate waters away from the tropics.

By now there is in excess of a billion of them, certainly enough to sustain a war against the dry world above the water line. So far as anyone can tell, their sole purpose is to expand their rule onto the quarter of the planet they didn't already control. Dry land is their last frontier, and they're going to roll over humanity like European settlers rolled over the Americas and Australia.

Atlanteans have TL9 equipment, but strictly speaking it's TL1+8. Use TL9 weapons and vehicles, but repackage them using sonic and "nacreous radiation" energy sources and radically unusual ceramic and metallic materials. See IW165 for an Atlantean character template.

A'Nthleioi rarely learn other languages than their own, which is very distantly related to Proto-Greek. This makes it difficult to communicate with them unless specifically trained in their speech or writing. Consider bullets instead.

The Secret

None of the other reasons mentioned above are responsible for saving Sydenham. Rather, Mt. Moosilauke is a center of old power, as discovered by Glyn Henry. When he was growing up he heard legends about the hills of Wales, and after emigrating to America came to find that they applied to the White Mountains as well. All this would have been academic if he didn't come to fear for his life after the Atlantean invasion. Acting on what little he knew, he kidnapped and sacrificed an itinerant laborer passing through Sydenham in the wake of the invasion.

The mountain heard. Its power is less than the Atlanteans' as a whole, but within a mile or two of its peak, it can befuddle the Atlanteans' minds and cause them to move along. Unfortunately, its inclination to protect Sydenham wanes over time, and Henry has to top it up with another sacrifice approximately once a year.

At first, Henry was alone in his action, but there was no easy prey from outside Sydenham the second year. He settled on young Patience Alford instead, a native of the town. Unlike the original victim, the townsfolk weren't willing to let this disappearance go, and eventually found her body on a natural stone altar up the cliff overlooking the north of Sydenham. Henry revealed his secret to the others, trusting to his charisma and their fear to see him through. It worked, though Patience's parents were reluctant to go along with the new ways and ended up dead themselves over the next few years. A few of the Sydenhamers (mostly the younger ones, as well as Dr. St.-Hilaire) don't know what's going on. The rest will work to frustrate the Infinity agents' ambitions. If the opportunity presents itself, they may even try to use one of the out-timers as the next sacrifice, and it would be a major coup if the entire group could be imprisoned, for doling out one per year each autumn over the next several years.

Clues

So how to arrive at the secret above? Investigators can discover any of the following facts that are relevant to the story:

- The church has a cellar beneath it, which can be locked from the outside. Sifting the dirt floor of the cellar will turn up food refuse and other junk that suggests someone has been down here for a while. The cellar has been used a few times to store an out-of-towner captured for use as a sacrifice at a later date.
- The Alford house has been abandoned for several years, yet as children are reaching adulthood and marrying they're building their own homes from scratch. The people of Sydenham stay away from anything to do with Alfords, so they won't be reminded that they were the first ones on the chopping block.
- The adventurers will be candidates for sacrifice themselves. To that end, the townsfolk will try to sabotage their conveyor so their prey can't escape. The tempting prospect of not having to murder one of their own will be offset by the suspicions the sabotage should raise in aware players.
- A study of the town's small graveyard will show that one person died on average every three years prior to the Atlantean invasion, mostly young children. Since then, the rate is more like one in six, and many fewer children are listed. Yet there are only eight children in the whole town, out of a population of 22. This is the grim result of these children being the victims of the town's sacrifices, and their bodies being buried on the ridge north of town.
- North of town is the ad hoc burial ground for the dead. Most are children, and show knife marks on their ribcages. Three are adults, and one has clearly suffered a gunshot-induced fracture to the left tibia. It did not heal before he died, but would not have been fatal itself. These are the mortal remains of one outsider who was shot to prevent escape, and sacrificed shortly after.

As well as the other, more mundane explanations mentioned before that point in the wrong direction, there is one other fact that seems to point to a solution, but does not.

- If plausibly accused of some deviltry, Dr. St.-Hilaire will admit to owning a pre-human idol, sent to him by a colleague who went with Napoleon to Egypt. It is the doctor's belief that the idol possesses some power over the A'Nthleioi that has protected Sydenham. He has hidden its existence from the other citizens of the town for fear

of their Christian disapproval (he himself is a deist). However, while it is an actual artifact, it is not magical and not responsible for Sydenham's continued existence.

Consequences

Once the sacrifices are discovered, there is the question of what to do about the situation. Certainly the team is going to want to save themselves, but once out of immediate danger, what then? The Sydenhamers don't have a lot of choice about how to save themselves; either they sacrifice one person a year, or *everyone* dies.

Players may be inclined to sympathy, though this reaction is probably going to be tempered by the townspeople trying to kill their characters. Unfortunately, the Infinity Corps is not going to look kindly on an evacuation, as their general policy is to not interfere with the many billions of people in dire straits throughout the continuum unless it's because of one of their own mistakes.

If they have a programmable conveyor, one possibility is that the team could evacuate Sydenham's people themselves. They're going to have to keep the personal possessions to a minimum, so ensuring their survival at the other end is going to take some pre-planning. The townsfolk are probably going to have to be convinced too.

Unfortunately, there aren't very many Q6 destinations where the Sydenhamers could fit into New Hampshire. Most are historical echoes, and so off-limits to unsanctioned travel unless the team wants to suffer extreme displeasure from their bosses after they are found out. Britannica-6 is one of the few remaining possibilities; Armada-2 might work as there are some Puritan descendants in the enlarged, independent Nouvelle-France and Dr. St-Hilaire speaks French natively.

It's more likely that the people of Sydenham will have to stay where they are. The players are going to have to decide if they'll let the sacrifices continue after they go, or if they are going to stop them (perhaps by killing, driving away, or annoying into inaction the source of the town's protection), and so consign Sydenham to discovery and death.

The Citizens

Glyn Henry: The original inhabitant of what was to become Sydenham emigrated to what was then the American Colonies in 1761. Seventeen years old at the time, he managed to acquire a land grant in New Hampshire a few years later, which he turned into a farm named Sydenham after his boyhood home in Kent where his Welsh father had been a forester.

For 30 years after that he had a good life, poor in money but well-fed and with a good family and neighbors. He enjoyed his status as first citizen of his small community. When the Atlanteans came, he kept that position and effectively became the de facto leader of a tiny country. His own morale has taken a tremendous beating, though. Still, he will do what he has to do to survive.

Henry's position rests on more than being the first Sydenhamer. When he was a boy, his father told him stories of the strange things he had seen in the Brecon Beacons. Glyn saw echoes of these in the highlands surrounding his new home, and gradually came to understand that there was something mystical going on on Mt. Moosilauke. After 1797, this knowledge became important (as explained above).

He is now 68 years of age, which is a good age for the early 19th century. He suspects and fears that some side effect of the sacrifices is extending his now miserable life. Another possible effect is that his strength does not seem to have diminished since he was young. That aside, he looks rather older than he is: wiry with a bowed back, and with wrinkled, mottled skin. His hair is still thick, but ivory white.

Geoffroy St.-Hilaire: A mere 25 years of age when he was sent from Paris by the French Directory to observer the attacks on the United States, St.-Hilaire was trapped on this side of the Atlantic after France itself was assaulted all along the coast in 1788. When eastern Massachusetts was attacked in force as well, he was pushed north from Boston,

then had to flee from Concord, New Hampshire when it too was taken. Heading northwest into the relative safety of the mountains, he ended up in Sydenham.

Dr. St.-Hilaire is a French man, 40 years of age, with a round face and a drastically receding hairline. What little foliage he has left on his head is black. He is 5'7" tall, and weighs 155 pounds.

His role in Sydenham is to supply adventurers with useful information about the Atlanteans -- he's a highly educated man by the standards of his time, though of a holistic, pseudo-mystical bent -- as well as being a red herring in the investigation into the sparing of the town.

Glyn Henry   *110 points*

Human

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 12 [4]; Will 13 [5]; Per 12 [0]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 5.5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 9 (Brawling).

Social Background

TL: 5 [0].
CF: New Englander (Native) [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages

Charisma 1 [5]; Clerical Investment [5]; Fit [5]; Single-Minded [5].

Disadvantages

Callous [-5]; Sense of Duty (Fellow Sydenhamers) [-10].

Skills

Animal Handling (Farm animals)-12 (IQ+0) [2]; Brawling-12 (DX+1) [2]; Driving/TL5 (Horse-drawn cart)-10 (DX-1) [1]; Farming/TL5-13 (IQ+1) [4]; First Aid/TL5 (Human)-12 (IQ+0) [1]; Fishing-12 (Per+0) [1]; Guns/TL5 (Musket)-13 (DX+2) [4]; Intimidation-12 (Will-1) [1]; Meteorology/TL5 (Earthlike)-11 (IQ-1) [1]; Occultism-11 (IQ-1) [1]; Professional Skill (Miller)-10 (DX-1) [1]; Professional Skill (Woodcutter)-11 (DX+0) [2]; Public Speaking-13 (IQ+1) [2]; Scrounging-12 (Per+0) [1]; Survival (Woodlands)-12 (Per+0) [2].

Geoffroy St.-Hilaire   *100 points*

Human

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 10 [0].
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 14 [0]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 0.

Social Background

TL: 5 [0].
CF: French (Native) [0].
Languages: English (Accented/Literate) [4]; French (Native/) [0].

Advantages

Extra Fatigue Points 1 (Affects displayed score) [3]; Extra Perception 1 (Affects displayed score) [5]; Unfazeable [15].

Disadvantages

Curious (12 or less) [-5]; Indecisive (12 or less) [-10]; Loner (12 or less) [-5]; Pacifism (Cannot Kill) [-15].
Quirks: Broad-Minded; Imaginative; Pines after French food [-3].

Skills

Biology/TL5 (Earthlike)-15 (IQ+2) [16]; Cartography/TL5-12 (IQ-1) [1]; Expert Skill (Natural Philosophy)-15 (IQ+2) [12]; First Aid/TL5 (Human)-14 (IQ+1) [2]; Occultism-12 (IQ-1) [1]; Public Speaking-13 (IQ+0) [2]; Research/TL5-15 (IQ+2) [8]; Scrounging-14 (Per+0) [1]; Survival (Jungle)-13 (Per-1) [1]; Survival (Woodlands)-14 (Per+0) [2]; Swimming-10 (HT+0) [1]; Teaching-13 (IQ+0) [2]; Writing-13 (IQ+0) [2].

Catherine Talbot: Despite her last name, she is the last of the Alfords. Born not long after the town was cut off from the world, she was taken in at age four by the Talbots when her mother committed suicide after losing the rest of her family to the sacrifices.

Just turned 15, Catherine has long noticed that the other Sydenhamers treated her coolly. In trying to find out why, she stole into the main Henry house and read Glyn Henry's journal, thereby discovering her true origins. A devout young woman, she was already greatly troubled by the three sacrifices she had seen in the company of her foster parents, and the reading the sordid fate of her real parents (and the sibling she never knew she had) has pushed her to the brink of rebellion. Further, she suspects that Henry knows she knows her background, and has chosen her to be this year's victim.

The appearance of the out-timers gives her an opportunity in two possible ways: she may become their ally in saving the town, or she may try to substitute one of them for herself on the altar. Which of these it will be will likely depend on events the Infinity agents start themselves. She will refuse to leave with the adventurers on her own, arguing that that would just mean someone else -- probably one of the few remaining children -- would be used in her stead.

If the team allows the sacrifices to continue, she will likely be murdered.

Catherine is a short (4'11"), white, female teenager, with long brown hair and brown eyes. She is quite skinny (as most people in Sydenham are from lack of variety in their diet), weighing only 90 lbs., and her ears stick prominently out of the sides of her head.

Catherine Talbot   *60 points*

Human

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16 lbs.; HP 10 [2]; Will 11 [5]; Per 10 [0]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 8 (Knife).

Social Background

TL: 5 [0].
CF: New Englander (Native) [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages

Fearlessness 2 [4]; Intuition [15]; Pitiable [5].

Disadvantages

Curious (12 or less) [-5]; Gullibility (12 or less) [-10]; Shyness (Mild) [-5]; Social Stigma (Minor: Last of the Alfords) [-5]; Squeamish (12 or less) [-10].
Quirks: Devoutly moral [-1].

Skills

Animal Handling (Farm Animals)-12 (IQ+2) [8]; Cooking-10 (IQ+0) [2]; Dancing-11 (DX-1) [1]; Farming/TL5-10 (IQ+0) [2]; First Aid/TL5 (Human)-11 (IQ+1) [2]; Games (Checkers)-12 (IQ+2) [4]; Hobby Skill (Spinning)-14 (DX+2) [4]; Knife-12 (DX+0) [1]; Singing-11 (HT+0) [1].

Other Adventures

The town itself is good for one adventure as the Infinity personnel uncover the secret to its survival. However, as a human-controlled spot in an otherwise hostile chunk of the planet, Sydenham makes an excellent place to stage raids against the A'Nthleioi; in other locations, humans pose enough of a threat to the invaders that they're much more on guard.

Before using Sydenham in other stories, though, the GM is going to have to think carefully about whether to place them before or after the discovery of the town's secret. If before, it will could let the players emotionally invest in the people who live there, increasing the impact of the Sydenhamers' actions when revealed. If set after, the need to return to Sydenham for whatever purpose gets interesting moral colors, especially if the team has been ordered to leave the townsfolk alone. If nothing else, the team is piggy-backing on the sacrifice-bought safety the town enjoys, which makes them at least partly culpable.

That said, there are several possibilities for more adventure:

- The Atlanteans use their "nacreous radiation" -- its color is very difficult to describe -- for work that needs large-scale power. Sydenham would make an excellent base for an expedition to Ar'anon'akil, the city under the waves of Lake Champlain. There, they can obtain a sample of the substance at the core of these devices: regular matter mystically exposed to the gaze of the ancient chaotic god at the center of time; After exposure it begins to crumble of its own accord, impossibly radioactive no matter what it was before.
- On most timelines, the central US had a series of strong earthquakes from December 1811 to February 1812. On Leviathan, however, it hasn't stopped, and more quakes are working their way northeast along the course of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers -- the last was not far from the ruins of Ithaca, New York. There are hints that the A'Nthleioi are somehow responsible for this continuation.

  The agents are given the task to find out what's going on, and Sydenham is a (rather distant) nearest free human settlement to Ithaca. As to ultimate source of the shaking, the site of the original quakes was on top of the Reelfoot Rift, an ancient geologic structure that was flooded 750 million years ago before being buried. Something ancient and slow may have landed to rest there, and now the Atlanteans are prodding it awake and into motion.

  If the GM wants to wrap up a set of stories in Leviathan, consider making the buried force good rather than evil.

The Atlanteans don't want to wake it, they want to kill it -- it's the only thing that could reverse their conquest of the Earth. Enter the adventurers and their curiosity about the quakes . . .

- For a GM looking to use the Atlanteans a little more, consider giving them sporadic, magical gates to other timelines. Rather like Reich-5, they can then be used as occasional villains in order to mix up the adventuring group's adversaries, and one can stick the gates at the bottoms of the deepest oceanic trenches so as to make it nearly impossible for anyone else to use them.

  For real fun, use Reich-5 and the A'Nthleioi simultaneously. Swastikas act on Atlanteans like crosses do to vampires, while Nazis have a horror for racial miscegenation. Fish-men who breed with humans to make more fish-men are problematic from their point of view.

Using Sydenham in Other Settings

Sydenham gets much of its flavor from being the stepchild of Washington Irving and H.P. Lovecraft, but certain core concepts translate well. Most importantly, its theme is to present the adventurers with people who are damned no matter what they do, either sure to die or party to terrible crimes. Worse, on top of the blood, they try to present themselves to the rest of the world as a little slice of pleasant normality otherwise lost to the past. When all is discovered, how should they be treated?

In science fiction games, put Sydenham on the wrong side of the front lines in the "war against inscrutable, murderous aliens" which graces most settings. *GURPS Traveller* GMs can use a world in the Chronor subsector of the Spinward Marches, originally colonized by Imperials but left in Zhodani hands after the Frontier Wars; games set in later time periods can use Virus or the Great Dominate as the civilization-threatening villains. In all cases, though, the specific pact with the devil made by the transformed Sydenhamers will depend very much on the game.

Historical, pulp, and modern-day games can all substitute the Atlanteans with any human antagonist powerful enough to commit at-least-regional massacres. Unfortunately, there are too many of these in world history to list, but the usual suspects like Nazis and Mongols are joined by more obscure possibilities like anti-Cathar Crusaders or Interahamwe.

Sydenham can be used most easily in fantasy games. It's just this side of being a fantasy setting as is, with a relatively low-tech town being threatened by a fantastic, magical race. Swap in kuo-toa or whatnot for Atlanteans, drop the level of technology back below gunpowder, and all is ready to go.

Icosahedron Adventures

Taking Trophies

by Owen K.C. Stephens

There's a broad class of fantasy art that shows heroic characters covered in trophies, tattoos, special seals, braids, and war paint. Characters from settings that support this visual style tend to be grim and gritty, with attitudes that can depress a jester and visages that frighten grown men. Often these marks are described as bearing great spiritual or cultural significance, showing the cunning, skill, or ferocity of those that bare them. Such characters are much rarer in most **d20 System** games, because there's no reason to bother with such ornate decoration.

There is, of course, no reason players can't decide to be grimly adorned or not as the dictates of their vision for their character demand. But let's face it, most **d20 System** games are driven in part by game mechanics so a GM who wants to encourage this kind of behavior (for a given culture or the whole campaign) would be well rewarded for given game-mechanical benefits for characters doing so. Also, it's just cool to be wearing a necklace made of the teeth of a winter wolf not just because you like it, but because your spiritual connection to it makes you resistant to cold damage.

Thus this article presents trophy feats: special feats that grant you bonuses only after you've overcome the right kind of foe and even then only when you're marked with the proper trophy. In addition to the feats themselves, an optional rule for gaining them without using a trophy slot is given as well, at the end of the article.

Trophy Feats: The core ability of trophy feats is to gain power from fallen foes by making a mark upon yourself. To take a trophy feat, you must have participated equally in the defeat of a foe under circumstances that meets the prerequisite enemy listed for each trophy feat you select. (While the GM is final arbiter of what counts as equal participation, normally if you deal at least 25% of the total damage done to it, or are the target of 25% of its efforts to harm others during the fight, you are considered an equal participant.) A single character may not use the same foe can not be used to qualify for more than one trophy feat, though several equal participants could all use the same foe for each of them to qualify for a trophy feat.

You must commemorate this victory with a major mark on your body, such as a large tattoo or major scarification pattern, or a token you make a visible and major part of your equipment. A token must either be made of a major physical element taken from a foe's corpse (a skull, wings, claws, or the like) or be custom-made ornamentation costing at least 500 gp and requiring a minimum DC 20 Craft check to construct. If the mark or token is ever removed or taken away, the trophy feat does not function until you regain/restore the missing mark or element.

You need not take a trophy feat immediately upon gaining a level that grants is. You can wait until you defeat an appropriate foe, or until you can arrange for an appropriate mark. However, if you have already defeated a qualified foe and marked yourself, you can take a trophy feat immediately upon gaining a new level granting it.

Select your trophy feats from those listed below.

Better Than You Have Tried

Prerequisite Enemy: A creature with a CR at least 2 above your level of the selected type.

Benefit: Select one type of creature. You gain a dodge bonus to AC against all attacks made by creatures of the selected type. This bonus is equal to the number of trophy feats you have taken.

But You *Have* Heard of Me

Prerequisite Enemy: A creature with a CR at least 2 above your level killed in the presence of at least 1,000 creatures with Intelligence scores of 3 or higher.

Benefit: You have a reputation, which unnerves creatures that deal with you. You gain a bonus to all Bluff, Diplomacy, and Intimidate checks made against creatures with an Intelligence score of 3 or higher. This bonus is equal to the number of trophy feats you have taken.

Don't Underestimate Me

Prerequisite Enemy: A creature with a CR at least 4 above your level that had DR or SR.

Benefit: You ignore a certain amount of DR, and gain a bonus to caster level checks made to overcome SR. The amount of DR you ignore and bonus to caster level checks is equal to the number of trophy feats you have taken. Thus a character that has this and a total of 2 other trophy feats striking a creature with DR 5/\u2013 ignores 3 points of the DR, and only has 2 points taken off weapon attacks that strike that foe.

Glory is Forever

Prerequisite Enemy: You must have delivered the death-blow to a foe that dropped you to negative hit points in the same fight.

Benefit: The next time you are killed by an enemy (not a trap, rockfall, or natural disaster), you are instead dropped to 1 hp and gain a terrible scar. Once this trophy feat is used, it does not function again (though it still counts as a trophy feat for determining the effects of other trophy feats). You may take this trophy feat more than once, each time granting you one additional use of its benefit.

I Don't Think So

Prerequisite Enemy: A spellcaster with a CR at least one higher than your level.

Benefit: You can delay the harmful effect of non-damaging magical effects, such as spells, spell-like abilities, and supernatural abilities. This includes any spell with a detrimental effect that does not deal hit point or ability score damage. You delay the effect a number of rounds equal to the number of trophy feats you have. During that delay you suffer none of the negative consequences of the magic effect, but can be subject to an effect that negates it. For example, a 3 rd level barbarian with this trophy feat could delay the sleeping effect of a *sleep* spell for 1 round. If during that round the barbarian was the subject of an *awaken spell*, it would negate the delayed *sleep* effect.

I Saw That Coming

Prerequisite Enemy: A creature that dealt damage to you higher than double your level during a surprise round you didn't act in.

Benefit: You gain a bonus to initiative checks, Listen and Spot checks made to act in the surprise round of a combat, and to reflex saves against traps and AC against attacks made by traps. The bonus is equal to the number of trophy feats you have.

It Could Be Worse

Prerequisite Enemy: Ten or more creatures in a single fight, from a force that outnumbered you and your allies.

Benefit: You may activate this trophy feat once per day, which requires a move action each round it functions. It lasts a number of rounds equal to the number of trophy feats you have. While it is active, allies within 30 feet of you do not provoke attacks of opportunity. This ability does not apply to you. You must be conscious, not prone, suffering no fear

effect, and able to be heard for this ability to function.

I've Killed Your Kind

Prerequisite Enemy: A creature with a CR at least 2 above your level of the selected type.

Benefit: You may select a favored enemy (as the ranger ability). You total bonus to skills and weapon damage against your favored enemy is equal to the number of trophy feats you have.

Let Me Show You a Trick

Prerequisite Enemy: A creature of the same type (and subtype if any) as you, that contested you in an opposed d20 check of some kind.

Benefit: Any time you make an opposed skill check (such as Hide vs Spot or Bluff vs Sense Motive), or an opposed ability score check, attack roll, or grapple check, you gain a bonus equal to the number of trophy feats you have.

Nice Try

Prerequisite Enemy: A creature with a CR at least 2 above your level that successfully used the chosen special attack on you.

Benefit: Choose one of the following special attacks: bull rush, disarm, feint, grapple, overrun, trip, or sunder. When someone successfully uses the chosen maneuver on you, you have a 50% chance of negating it. If your negation succeeds, you are restricted to a partial action on your next move (having used some movement to negate the special attack).

You may take this trophy feat more than once. Normally, you must select a different special attack each time. If you defeat a second creature using the same special attack you may take this a second time, increasing your negation chance to 90%.

Scars Don't Hurt

Prerequisite Enemy: A creature that dealt damage to you higher than double your level with an attack of the selected type.

Benefit: Choose one energy type, or Force effects or un-typed magic damage. You gain energy resistance against that type. The resistance is equal to 5 points per trophy feat you have taken.

That the Best You Can Do?

Prerequisite Enemy: A creature that dealt 50 or more points of damage to you in a single attack.

Benefit: Any time you would die as a result of an effect other than being taken to -10 or fewer hit points (such as failing a saving throw against massive damage, or being subject to a power word: kill when below the hit point limit), you may make a Fortitude or Will save (your choice) to avoid death. You gain a bonus to this check equal to the number of trophy feats you have.

You Don't Impress Me

Prerequisite Enemy: A creature with a CR at least 2 above your level that had a fear effect.

Benefit: You take reduced effects from fear and despair effects. If you have one or two total trophy feats fear effects

can't make you worse than shaken, and you never take more than a -2 penalty from despair. If you have three or four trophy feats, you are immune to fear and despair. If you have five or more trophy feats, allies within 60 feet of you are never more than shaken by fear, or take more than a -2 penalty from despair.

Alternate Methods of Gaining Trophy Feats

It is possible to gain a trophy feat without spending an available feat slot. To do so, a character must first qualify to take the feat (meeting its prerequisite enemy). Then the character must take part in a day-long ceremony. The ceremony must be specially designed for this purpose, which requires a DC 20 Knowledge (religion) check, and it consumes special herbs and incenses with a total cost of 5,000 gp. The ceremony takes one day, and requires a minimum of 5 people to perform in addition to the character gaining the feat.

At the conclusion of this ceremony, the character is given the trophy (either a crafted item or special body marking, as defined in Trophy Feats, above). The character sacrifices any one magic item slot, preventing him from wearing magic items that use that slot, and gains the desired trophy feat. If the character ever regains access to magic items that use the sacrificed slot, the bonus trophy feat is lost.

For example, Tarnak the Shadow Killer has slain a creature with a CR 2 above his own that successfully disarmed him, so he qualifies to take the Nice Try trophy feat against disarming. He gathers the priests and material he needs, and has a ceremony performed that culminates in a tattoo of runes of steadfastness being placed on both his hands. He sacrifices the torso magic item slot, preventing him from ever using a magic shirt, vest, or vestment. He now has the Nice Try feat as a bonus feat.

Mjolnir, the Hammer of Thor

for *GURPS*

by James L. Cambias

The greatest treasure of the Norse gods, Mjolnir is the Hammer of Thor. In legend, it is the thunderbolt, smashing whatever Thor throws it at, and enabling the Aesir to keep the giants at bay. It had other powers, as well: When Thor feasted on the meat of his goats, he could restore them to life by passing his hammer over the bones and skin. Norse religious ceremonies used the sign of the hammer as a blessing, and many believers wore silver hammer amulets for protection. Full-size bronze hammers were kept in temples to Thor.

According to Norse myth, the Hammer was made for Thor by the dwarfs as part of a wager made by the trickster-god Loki, who bet his head that the dwarfs could not complete three great treasures in a limited time. The Hammer was the last and greatest of the three, and Loki, trying to keep the dwarfs from winning the bet, took the form of a fly and stung them at their work. As a result, the handle of Mjolnir was short. Nevertheless, all agreed that the dwarfs had won the bet, and Loki only escaped beheading by pointing out that the terms of the agreement only mentioned his *head* -- the dwarfs did not have the right to harm his *neck* and so could not behead him. So they contented themselves with sewing up his lips.

The connection of axes and hammers with thunder and lightning is an old and mysterious one. The Minoans used the double-headed axe, or *labrys* as a thunder symbol, and were so fond of the image that they used it all through the vast and hard-to-navigate palace at Knossos -- giving it the name *labyrinth* as a result.

Paranormal pack rat Charles Fort describes numerous instances of "thunderstones," which were axehead-shaped stones found at the site of lightning strikes. He cited finds of thunderstones in China, Africa, Jamaica, France, and Java, among others. There are reports going back to the 15th century. In all cases the stones were polished wedge shapes, very different from the starburst or braided form of "fulgurites," which are made of sand and soil fused by lightning. Nor did they resemble meteorites. Fort suggested the stones might be messages from space to secret societies on Earth -- was Thor really Grey-skinned under that bushy red beard?

Where Thor's hammer is to be found is a mystery. If Thor still exists on some other plane, then his weapon is probably still in his possession. Humans trying to get it will have to take on the mighty thunder god himself on his home territory. Good luck.

But if Thor died or lost his divine powers with the fading of the Norse religion (or if Thor was in fact merely a human hero who only became a god in legend), then the hammer may have been left behind. There were numerous temples of Thor throughout Scandinavia, with a major center at Uppsala in Finland. With the coming of Christianity the pagan temples were torn down or converted to churches, and the bronze hammers of Thor were melted down. Dedicated pagans took their faith westward, first to Ireland, where a large Thor temple stood in Dublin, and then to Iceland. The hammer may be hidden in some Irish monastery or in a barrow in Iceland.

Or it may have been carried to the Vinland settlements in Newfoundland. If the Kensington Rune Stone is to be believed (and it probably shouldn't), Norse explorers may have crossed the Great Lakes, penetrating as far as Minnesota. A group of Wild West cowboys could find a mighty strange old hammer if they go poking in any funny "Indian burial mounds" up in the Dakota Territory.

Whatever and wherever it is, Thor's Hammer is a mighty weapon. It embodies the power of the thunderbolt. It can be used hand-to-hand as a warhammer, or thrown as a thrown mace. Whatever it hits takes an additional 8d of burn damage, with the Surge modifier effect (p. 105). It is magically accurate, giving a +2 bonus to hit its target when thrown. However, the hammer is dangerous to use -- even Thor has to wear iron gloves. The user takes 2d of burn damage each time he picks up the hammer!

The hammer itself is nearly unbreakable. No mundane damage can harm it at all. Even an atomic blast would only burn off the leather wrappings on the handle. It has Magic Resistance at level 20, and is completely unaffected by any magical lightning or electrical-type effect.

Magically, the Hammer is also quite powerful. It gives any sorcerer who can hold it a skill bonus of +10 to cast any lightning-based magic, or to cast any summoning magic directed at gods or beings from Norse mythology. (Note that it doesn't give any bonus to command or bind them, and the first thing any of Thor's kin are likely to say is "Give me that hammer, mortal!")

The Hammer gives a +5 skill bonus for all weather magic (not cumulative with the +10 for lightning spells). It also functions as a 20-point Powerstone. If the GM is using the Hermetic magic modifiers from *GURPS Cabal,* the Hammer resonates powerfully with the decan Isro, giving a +3 modifier for Air spells (instead of the weather bonus). Because of Thor's identification with Jupiter, spells governed by any other decan connected with that planet get a +1 modifier if the Hammer is present.

Since it is the weapon of a god, Mjolnir is a holy object. When it is present, the local Sanctity is automatically "Very High Sanctity" for worshippers of Thor, and "High Sanctity" for devotees of any of the Norse or Teutonic gods (except, of course, Thor's hated kinsman Loki). All evil creatures of Norse myth are terrified of the Hammer and must make a Fright Check upon seeing it. Minor beings (dwarfs, dark elves, etc.) are at a -5 penalty to Will; more powerful ones roll normally. Double or triple the penalty if Thor himself is holding it.

Thor's Hammer weighs 20 pounds. Its head is a foot long and four inches across. The handle is two feet long. It appears to be made of bronze, but is chemically inert and indestructible. In any setting it is beyond price to those who know what it is. A modern museum or collector might value an "ancient Viking ritual object" at a million dollars or more.

There are two obvious adventure types involving Mjolnir: the heroes can either be looking for the Hammer themselves, or dealing with an adversary who has already found it. These two basic concepts can be used in almost any setting, from *GURPS Vikings* onward in history. They are especially apt for *Cliffhangers* or *Weird War II* scenarios in which the Nazis are trying to get the Hammer or the Allies are trying to get it away from them. As Marvel Comics has demonstrated, Thor's Hammer fits perfectly into the superheroic idiom, though GMs should make it clear to their players that this one *won't* turn you into a blonde hunk who talks like Ivanhoe.

Thematically, the Hammer can also be used to examine the temptations of power. Owning the Hammer makes a mortal nearly a god. What will that do to someone? What are the PCs willing to do in order to get and keep Mjolnir themselves? With its great power at their command, what will they do? This sort of scenario might fit better into a *GURPS Cabal* or *Illuminati* campaign.

Alternate Hammers

As described, Mjolnir is a magic item, chiefly of use to those with the ability to cast spells using the *GURPS Magic* system. But there are some other possibilities.

Gamemasters can throw their players a curve ball by assuming the "dwarfs" in the legend are actually the subterranean Deros described by Richard Shaver (see *GURPS Warehouse 23* for more on deros), or the alien Greys. In that case, the Hammer *isn't* a magical item, but instead a powerful technological device. In one Poul Anderson short story Mjolnir is simply a time-traveler's .45 automatic. A traveler from a more distant future (or a more advanced alternate world) might carry an electrolaser other energy gun.

To throw a different sort of curve ball, perhaps the Hammer isn't really a weapon at all. Some ancient Norsemen found an alien artifact -- a cold fusion power cell, or a tachyon communicator -- which just happened to be hammer-shaped, and mistook it for the weapon of their thunder god. That still means Mjolnir is fantastically valuable, but reduces the danger that neo-nazi cultists can use it to summon a vengeful god. Of course, neo-nazi cultists may think otherwise,

and can still cause problems for archaeologists looking for the thing.

Appendix Z

Elemental Side Effects in *d20 System*

by Michael Tresca

Sure, it's easy to hurl fireballs and lightning bolts at foes. But what's left in the aftermath? This article examines just what happens when wizards go to war; or rather, the environmental effects of what's left when they're done. After a spell caster witnesses the damage he's done to the local environment, he might think twice before casting a spell in his home town.

Side Effects

Although many spells have a duration of Instantaneous, their effect can be felt long afterwards. Cold spells freeze the terrain, fire spells scorch it, and lightning spells . . . the less said about them, the better. What adventurers might not realize is that they leave behind telltale signs of their presence after a magical battle, sometimes with long-lasting effects.

Acid

Acid area-effect spells, like *acid fog,* scorch everything, pitting the ground and destroying the terrain beneath. Vegetation withers and dies, water becomes tainted, and rocks become scoured with tiny droplets. All vegetation within the area effect is destroyed after one round of damage. After two rounds, the earth itself is barren and will not grow plants for a number of months equal to the acid spell's level. Similarly, water supplies are mildly acidic, killing off fish and other aquatic life for the acid spell's level in days. The water certainly tastes bad and may even be mildly acidic, inflicting 1 point of acid damage for a number of minutes after the spell is cast equal to the acid spells' level. For the purposes of tracking, acid spells provide a +1 bonus per spell level of the acid spell to track spell casting opponents on solid ground.

Cold

Cold area-effect spells, like *cone of cold, freezing sphere, ice storm,* and *wall of ice,* flash-freeze the surrounding vegetation and earth. Then, as the climate acclimates, the frost turns to water. And water has to go somewhere. It takes the cold spell's level in rounds to melt completely. During that time, any water in the area effect of the cold spell is frozen and slick. Characters walking on ice must spend 2 squares of movement to enter a square covered by ice, and the DC for Balance and Tumble checks increases by +5. Once the ice melts, it seeps into the ground, creating water as per the create water spell as half the spell's level. Dry earth becomes wet earth, and wet earth becomes thick mud. A creature in mud must succeed on a Reflex save (DC caster level) or be caught for 1d2 rounds and unable to move, attack, or cast spells. A creature that succeeds on its save can move through the mud at half speed, and it can't run or charge.

Electricity

Electricity area-effect spells, like *call electricity, call electricity storm,* and *electricity bolt,* seriously damage the environment. Electricity striking flammable material, like scrub or woods, has a percentage change equal to the spell's level of starting a forest fire. In sandy areas, electricity fuses the soil or sand into glass, called fulgurites. Fulgurites bestow a +2 bonus per spell level to a Track check to track a spell caster.

Perhaps the most significant challenge of an electricity spell is that it is always followed by thunder. Electricity produced at close range (such as a electricity bolt spell) produces a loud crack of thunder, audible up to one mile per

level of the spell (+10 per spell level to Listen checks). The sound of thunder most certainly terrifies nearby animals, requiring riders to make a Handle Animal check. Most normal animals instinctively flee electricity and must make a Will save (DC 10 + spell level) or be panicked.

Fire

Fire area-effect spells, like *burning hands, delayed blast fireball, fire seeds, fire storm, fire trap, fireball, flame strike, flaming sphere, incendiary cloud, meteor storm, produce flame,* and *wall of fire,* have an obvious effect on the environment. Fire spells have a chance equal to the spell's level of igniting flammable materials and starting a blaze. In addition, fire spells reduce water by up to 1 foot per spell level (or reduce ice by up to 6 inches per spell level), turning it into steam. This steam has the same effects as fog for 1 round per spell level, providing concealment. Scorched areas provide a +1 bonus per spell level to a Track check to track a spell caster.

Like lightning, animals instinctively avoid fire. Most normal animals must make a Will save (DC 10 + spell level) or be panicked.

Sonic

Sonic attacks are peculiar in that they range from loud noises to low-level vibrations. Sonic spells, such as *shatter, shout, song of discord,* and *sound burst,* are essentially sonic booms. They cause hairline fractures in the area of effect, providing a +1 bonus per spell level to Track the spell caster. They also provide a +2 bonus per spell level to Listen checks up to 1 mile per spell level away.

In addition, sonic booms rattle the integrity of structures; damage should be applied to everything in range of a sonic attack, including walls and ceilings. A weakened ceiling can be spotted with a DC 20 Knowledge (architecture and engineering) or DC 20 Craft (stonemasonry) check. Remember that Craft checks can be made untrained as Intelligence checks. A dwarf can make such a check if he simply passes within 10 feet of a weakened ceiling.

When Did Pickpockets Start Carrying Uzis?

What do you do about mooks?

You know, those omnipresent low-level encounters that seem to appear with distressing regularity in the first scene of the adventure in many campaigns. Think about it: Do you design mooks for the challange of the heroes, or do you design them for some sort of realism in the game world?

This question came to mind when I noticed a discussion on a message board about police officer stats in the most recent *World of Darkness* game. These guys are pretty darn pumped, with stats that place them partially within maxed-out potential for humans. In the thread this was explained away partly by the fact that these represent more "cream of the crop" cops rather than newly deputized Officer Knownothing, and partly by the fact that, hey, if these guys are going to be presented as possible antagonists for vampires and werewolves, they need to be a bit beefier than your schmoe on the street less they turn into blue-clad claw-cloggers.

This strikes me as being two somewhat valid answers, but the question remains: What do you do as the campaign progresses? After all, a group of four or five officers might put up a good fight for a group of starting PCs, but the same group is going to chuckle briefly before mowing them down a few months later.

Well, off the top of my head, here are some answers that spring to mind.

First, the obvious answer is to keep pumping up the mooks. In a point-based game, perhaps those initial mooks were built on 50 points and, as the campaign progresses, they elevate up to 100 points. Of course, this can stretch credulity somewhat, as the heroes realize that these minor characters are built on more points than their starting heroes. ("What happened?! Did the mook academy start pumping everyone full of steroids?!")

Worse, the players may feel like their advancement and accomplishments don't mean anything; after all, if your purse-stealing mugger is going to be the same magnitude of threat on Day One as it is three years later, what incentive is there to get any better? This was a cardinal sin of the computer/video game *Elder Scrolls: Oblivion.* In an effort to make random encounters challenging, the base game pumped all such creatures to be a (more or less) equal challenge; thus a random wolf found after advancing to level 20 presents the same sort of threat that it did back at level 1 . . . making one wonder why this mad-whack überpumped wolf hadn't destroyed whole cities before you stumbled across him in the wilds. (Fortunately the game was designed to be easily modified and tweaked, and many people have released patches that tame these critters to a more reasonable level. This option isn't available in most tabletop games.)

In some game systems, the "mook elevation conundrum" is resolved via the ecology of the game world itself. For example, your base *d20 System* resource document comes with an alphabetical listing of such foes, 73% of which have been officially Mook Potential Cerfified, depending on the level of the characters involved. Your lowly newbie heroes might be fighting hoardes of kobold rake-wielders, but soon they'll be graduating to mowing down crews of dark elf assassins, and they'll eventually get to the point where your ultra-buff heroes are going to be utterly unphased to find a six-pack of red dragons in a 10-foot-square room. And if the players dig that elevated action, then by all means go for it.

In other systems, there's the opposite issue: Mooks are *always* about as effective as ever. This is most often the case in remotely realistic systems (such as *GURPS*) where, say, a guy with a gun still stands a real chance of doing serious damage against a super-trained ninja, no matter how many points he's built on.

However, for systems that don't focus on realism, it's possible that the players will still enjoy facing mooks to varying degrees, but there isn't the desire to pump up the challenge (at least, not every time). There are still options to keep the combat pumpin'. First, there's the possibility of [secondary objectives or complications](). After all, if the mooks are holding the mayor hostage, then it no longer becomes a matter of will the heroes beat the mooks; of course they will. The question now becomes, "Will they save the mayor?" Turning things around, it's also possible for the *players* to dictate the level of secondary activity. For example, let's say you're running a mid-to-high-powered Supers game and

the heroes encounter a group of random thugs breaking into a warehouse. The GM might say, "Okay; you're going to mop the floor with these folks; we can just skip the battle and go on to the 'drop them off at the police' section, if you want. Alternatively, if anyone wants to accomplish anything else with this encounter, let me know and we can do that. Up to you." And one player might be interestd in trying to earnestly reform these criminals, while another hero wants to test a new power, and the third protagonist wants to indulge his kleptomania by seeing what loot they took from the warehouse without attracting the attention of his teammates. In this case, the players can control the pace of what happens, and what would normally be a mundane mook mash becomes more interesting.

Of course, there's the question of whether there should even *be* mooks in the first place. The video game ***Shadow of the Colossus*** is noteworthy because the pixelated protagonist does nothing but "boss" fights -- those battles that usually take place at the end of the level, only after fighting a jillion lesser foes; this game has dispensed with the "wave after wave" mook grind entirely. Now, some games already take this approach. For example, many supers-based campaigns really only have the heroes square off against more worthy opponents (as in "other super-powered folks"). But this approach often isn't seen in other campaigns. Imagine this: Take your standard fantasy dungeon crawl, complete with traps, secret doors, and what not, but remove *every* battle except the final encounter. Now, if possible, have that final baddie try to utilize the rest of the dungeon itself to take out the heroes. Glimpses from the shadows, signs of just not-quite-faced confrontation, and so on, all leading toward The Big Fight . . . which hopefully the heroes (and players) will be deeply itching for by then. And the idea is even adaptable elsewhere; why do horror games need "lesser" foes for the heroes to thwart? Just have one big final foe and be done with it.

Obviously, if players have a good time, it doesn't matter *what* happens with mooks. But sometimes things are just done a certain way because no one's given it any thought otherwise. So, hopefully, now you have some better ideas for how to handle your hoard of henchmen, instead of falling back what everyone else expects. After all, doing things just because you were told to . . . well, that's mook thinking, right there.

--*Steven Marsh*

Murphy's Rules

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Review

Elvis: The Legendary Tours (for [Diana: Warrior Princess](#))

Written & Published by [Marcus L. Rowland](#)

Illustrated by Patrick Sterno & Marcus Rowland

Cover by Aaron Williams

55-page 2.5-meg b&w PDF Document; $3.99

Marcus L. Rowland's *[Diana: Warrior Princess](#)* did for the 20th century what *Xena: Amazon Princess* and *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* both did for the tales and myths of the ancient world, but without setting it in New Zealand or using push-up bras. Actually that last bit is not true, but applied mostly to minor characters or extras who wear revealing costumes to give the series that oh so enticing cake -- beef or cheese -- factor. Run through with a rich vein of satire, that game was primarily written for two players, who took on the *Diana: Warrior Princess* television series' starring roles, Princess Diana and her sidekick, the hapless Fergie. Armed with the Mystic Powers of Royalty, together they traveled across a Mythic Englande, and occasionally beyond, righting wrongs, doing good, but mostly working to thwart the evil wrought by Diana's ex-mother-in-law and worshipper of Landmines, the God of War, the Queen Mother, and also that of the arch sorceress, Chancellor Thatcher. Occasionally though, Diana was aided by allies such as Wild Bill Gates, river boat gambler, Ron L. Hubble, entrepreneur and conman, and Red Ken, London Underground leader and friend to newts everywhere. All of whom are guest star roles that can be taken by other players. Of course, a player can create his on character, but the game's focus was very much on the given cast.

In this televisual day and age, a successful series calls for spin-offs. Naturally the *Diana: Warrior Princess* television series being a success, it is no surprise that we have a spin-off. Originally mentioned in **Diana: Warrior Princess,** the setting for **Elvis: The Legendary Tours** is a Mythic America (previously visited in **Diana: Warrior Princess'** scenario "Diana Does Dallas"). From that short mention, Marcus L. Rowland has developed it into a full-blown supplement (and of course, a far future television series), in which the famous bard Elvis is forced to wander Mythic America, exiled from the magical kingdom of Land of Grace by his evil half-brother, Abbott Costello. Equipped with a silver stringed guitar and Blue Suede seven league boots, and with a penchant for white sequined (and always clean and sparkling) jumpsuits, Elvis is accompanied in his quest by two companions. One is John Lenin, barbarian bass player and warrior, a simple man who loves strong ale, good food, and fine women. The other is "Senator" Joe McCartney, ex-politician, ex-thief turned guitarist who has reformed (mostly) and now follows Elvis' lead.

Additionally Elvis is occasionally aided by three other legends of Mythic America, each also available to play. Billie "Doc" Holliday is not only a roaming frontier doctor, dentist, midwife, vet, and law-woman, but also an occasional accompanist on stage. If Elvis has a big gig or needs a session player, then Bob "The Builder" Marley is the man. Able to get a stage set up virtually anywhere, play most instruments and sing if needed, but preferring to remain back stage, the thickly accented roadie possesses the Mystic Power of Ganja. Far less trusted is Jean-Claude Van Halen, a bard and shaman from the mysterious East (Boston), master of the martial art Sudoku. Also a philosophy, a student of [Su-Doku, the "way of the exploding grid"](#) meditates upon a grid of numbers to gain insightful visions and learns numbered martial arts moves that require him to grow the nail of his index finger.

Abbot Costello is not the only villain Elvis must face, but he is the main one. After all, he wants to steal Elvis' Mystic Powers, use them for his own ends, and truly cement himself as the Land of Grace's rightful ruler. Fortunately for Elvis, the head of Palace Guard, Colonel Parker, seems to be more concerned with the kingdom's safety and is loyal to the throne rather than Elvis' half-brother. The other major villain is Uncle Sam. This scheming dictatorial warmonger worships Landmines, the God of War, and leads his "Sons of Sam" in mighty plans to conquer all of Mythic America.

This means that his agents can be found causing trouble everywhere. He hates all foreigners, and that includes Elvis. King Martin Luther is not really an enemy, but both he and the Church of the Supreme Being he heads regards Elvis' music as "lewd" and "unseemly." Other threats take the form of musical rivals, from the Booze Brothers to the Five Jacksons (Steve, Jesse, Samuel, Peter, and Pollock), to a dazzling array of Elvis impersonators, including clones, gods, and killer robots.

Mythic America, like Mythic Englande, is a land of gods and goddesses, though fewer make an appearance in *Elvis: The Legendary Tours* than in *Diana: Warrior Princess,* and thus most are described in *Diana: Warrior Princess;* however, three appear regularly in this spin-off. Ray, the God of the Sun and Music, loves to challenge musicians to impossible contests and is often served by the half-women half-bird monsters known as the Groupies. Eyepoade is both the Goddess of Recording and Demigoddess of Orchards (her symbol being a bitten pear) and likes to attend concerts to ensure that the best are recorded. The Goddess of Dance, Dysko is bedazzled by flashiness and superficiality and unlike the first two deities, is not too bothered with musical skill or substance.

To create characters for *Elvis: The Legendary Tours,* players still need to refer to *Diana: Warrior Princess.* If playing the core trio of characters, Elvis has Star Status, John Lenin and "Senator" Joe McCartney are Co-Stars, while most other characters are either Guest Stars or Villains. The skills are the same broad categories, but with two additions. The Mystic Powers of Music do not replace the Mystic Powers of Royalty, but duplicate many of its abilities. Likewise the Music skill does not replace the Artist skill, being more of an emphasis for this spin-off. It covers not only singing, playing, and composing music, but all of the back-stage technical know-how as well. It can be combined with Mystic Powers or the Charisma skill, or even both for astounding live performances or other bardic effects, including healing wounds, soothing the savage beast, and resisting the evil effects of Mystic Powers. During a concert a bard as good as Elvis can draw extra Mystic Power from the audience. Called "feedback," when it gets out of control it can cause rioting and even draw the attention of the gods, who dislike mere mortals rivalling their musical abilities.

In terms of adventures, *Elvis: The Legendary Tours* follows the same format as *Diana: Warrior Princess.* This means a detailed episode outline designed to help the GM get the series' feel and style and is easily adapted to play, followed by eight episode treatments that need further development. Finally there is the scenario, "You Ain't Nothing But A Hound Dog." Opening with the rhythmic trio foiling a dance cult's evil plans, it sends them off to investigate an outbreak of lycanthropy, encountering both a new villain and a whole new world along the way! The scenario does veer into *[Forgotten Futures](#)* territory towards the end, but is nevertheless entertaining. Unsurprisingly, both the titles and inspirations for the scenario and episode treatments are drawn from Elvis' back catalogue. And since only 10 song titles are used, the GM still has plenty to choose from, plus a ready soundtrack to the series.

Physically, *Elvis: The Legendary Tours* is an easy-to-read PDF, lightly illustrated with caracticture for the series cast and a few pieces previously seen in *Forgotten Futures.* The last page is given over to the equivalent of a back page blurb, worth checking out not just for the sales pitch of said blurb, but the critic's quotes for *Diana: Warrior Princess.* Not just my own of course (you have already read that one), but the hilarious misunderstanding of a particular comment on Amazon.com.

Unsurprisingly, *Elvis: The Legendary Tours* is another showcase for Marcus L. Rowland's trademark penchant for puns and relish for references. The latter include much to do with Elvis naturally, but others range from the Beatles to *C.S.I.,* and from *Star Trek* to eBay. Most of them are genuinely both funny and groanworthy, not just to read, but also to play. The supplement suggests that this series be less episodic and more of a serial, since Elvis does actually have a proper objective in returning to the Land of Grace to overthrow his half-brother. Certainly in the scenario given, "You Ain't Nothing But A Hound Dog," this series has feel of a Western, and it is no surprise to see the television series *Firefly* and *The Wild, Wild West* both listed in the acknowledgements. Of course, as a Western, *Elvis: The Legendary Tours* is a far wilder and much woollier . . .

Where *Diana: Warrior Princess* was good, being funny in a satirical sense, *Elvis: The Legendary Tours* is better, being funny in a broader sense. Much of this comes from the wider range of references, which makes this spin-off one of Americana as opposed to *Diana: Warrior Princess'* quaint and slightly obscure Englishness. The result is that the comedy of *Elvis: The Legendary Tours* deserves to appeal to a much to a wider audience and indicate that there is more life to the faux historical format first seen in Diana: *Warrior Princess.*

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Paths of the Damned: Spires of Altdorf (for Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay)

Published by Black Industries

Developed by Green Ronin Publishing

Written by David Chart with Kate Flack, Chris Pramas, & Gav Thorpe

Cover by Christer Sveen

Illustrated by Tony Parker & Christer Sveen

Cartography by Shawn Brown

96-page b&w hardcover; $24.95

Spires of Altdorf is the second part of the *Paths of the Damned* trilogy for *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*. It is also the third part of the campaign begun in "Through the Drakwald," found in the core book, following on from *Ashes of Middenheim*. Where that scenario suffered in being too linear, sending the adventurers out to deal with one threat, grab any treasure and come back to repeat the exercise over again, it is pleasing to see that *Spires of Altdorf* escape that structure to provide a more player-driven affair. This is the author's first work for the game, being better known for his re-design of *Ars Magica* and supplements such as *The Medieval Player's Manual*. That said, if the interesting *d20 System* scenario *Splintered Peace* is any indication, then *Spires of Altdorf* could be a big improvement upon *Ashes of Middenheim.*

As the title suggests, the setting for this scenario is Altdorf, capital of the Empire, and a city that was barely visited in *The Enemy Within* campaign, let alone detailed. Not just home to the Emperor, the headquarters for each of the Orders of Magic is here (and weird places they are), as is the Cult of Sigmar, the Empire's state religion. A river port, Altdorf is dominated by its many guilds, membership of which is seen by many as the path to increased income, greater status, and better housing a little bit further above the stench emanating from both the River Reik and the city's often-blocked sewerage system. Even those at the bottom of the heap have airs and graces, or at least an attitude that sees themselves as superior to anyone not from Altdorf. This includes the large numbers of refugees who have come to the city in the wake of the upheavals caused by the Storm of Chaos, and naturally, the player characters.

Given the slim nature of the book, it is no surprise that Altdorf is described in only broad detail. The focus is upon locations specific to the adventure and descriptions of places the party is likely to visit during its course. Although not the equal of a good city sourcebook there is enough information here to not only run each specific location, but for the GM to provide variation if the characters visit one or more of the generic places. These cover the mansions of the rich, the tenements of the poor, taverns, markets, fighting rings, and the street. All locations describe what might happen if the adventurers opt to talk, sneak, or fight there and all come with a set of scenario hooks. There is also advice to help the GM capture the feel of the city.

Unfortunately, the hooks are the first of the supplement's small problems. Too many of them dwell on Chaos as a threat. The Old World is a grim and perilous place, but not everything dark and dangerous is due to the influence of

Chaos and a little more inventiveness in these hooks would have been preferable, especially since the main plot revolves around a Chaos threat. The second is the lack of a decent map of Altdorf. It does say that no one has accurately mapped the city within the game, but a map is one of these aids useful to any GM, and certainly, there is space for it on the otherwise blank inside cover. Plus, using an old and small map feels a bit cheap.

Following from the events described in *Ashes of Middenheim,* the adventurers have learnt that once again, the Empire is threatened by Chaos. They had discovered that a Chaos cult, the Crimson Skull, had been working to free an imprisoned Daemon of Khorne, known as Xathrodox Incardine. His essence has been split into three and bound into separate artifacts. The first artifact has already been dealt with, but research turns the name of the next, the Dagger of Yul K'chaum, and that it was last heard of in Altdorf. Armed with the knowledge that the next artifact is located in the Imperial capital and a contact letter, the adventure begins with the characters on the road to Altdorf. Even though they attach themselves to a larger party of refugees traveling west to escape the Storm of Chaos, safety in numbers proves to be not the case, the journey proves a perilous one, but of course, the real dangers lie ahead.

Where *Spires of Altdorf* really differs from *Ashes of Middenheim* is in the plotting. *Spires of Altdorf* has three, all running parallel to each other. Since they each have their own chapters, the GM will need to flip back and forth between them as the adventure progresses, weaving the three plots together. Really though, this is not all that complex a prospect for an experienced GM, rather that it is more complex in comparison to the linear Ashes of Middenheim.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

Plot one has remnants of the cult the adventurers disbanded in Middenheim harassing them and making the occasional assassination attempt. Plot two has the party trying to locate, obtain, and finally destroy the artifact. Plot three has someone else trying to obtain it, but for his own nefarious ends, rather than to destroy it. The Dagger of Yul K'chaum, being of course a Chaos artifact, is a nasty vicious item, not too dissimilar to the infamous Stormbringer, especially as it wants someone to use it.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Physically, *Spires of Altdorf* is a decent affair, laid out in the fashion typical of the ***Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*** line. This also means that the artwork is dark and grim, doing a good job of illustrating the writing. The writing though, is excellent, never less than clear and helpful for an inexperienced GM trying to run what is to him a complex scenario after *Ashes of Middenheim.* For the players it offers a certain amount of investigation, definitely much more interaction, and requires far more roleplaying than its predecessor. It does not stint on opportunities for a good fight though. Another good feature of the scenario is that there is not just one method of solving the problem faced by the adventurers. There is an optimum or rather a safe method, the others having consequences . . . some of which will prove deadly to the characters.

Strong on roleplaying, social interaction, and investigation, *Spires of Altdorf* brings the ***Paths of the Damned*** trilogy back on track ready for the finale, ***Forges of Nuln,*** feeling far more like the ***Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*** of old.

--Matthew Pook

The Omniscient Eye

How Much Is That Humanzee in the Window?

I've heard it said (on quite reputable documentaries) that Chimps and Humans could potentially cross-breed. Although no evidence exists of such a hybrid, what would be the (ch)implications of such a successful mating? More importantly, would the offspring be sterile (like a mule), insanely powerful (like a liger), or could it eventually lead to an hybrid-ape uprising that would sink the Statue of Liberty into the sands of some far-flung future beach? I suppose such a hybrid might be created in a test-tube, assuming you could get willing participants, some Barry White music and a *very big* test-tube.
--Blake Smith

Definition of Terms

A hybrid (from latin *hybrida* -- a term that was used for the offspring of wild boar and domestic swine) is the product of two organisms that do not belong to the same taxonomic group. Usually, they are the offspring of genetically compatible parents produced by breeding of different varieties, species, or races. Cells from a hybrid's body have a single genetic code combined out of the genes of the two parent organisms.

A chimera, on the other hand, combines cells of two organisms. They have different sets of cells (making up the liver, lung, heart etc.) with different DNAs, each coming from another parent. They are practically a mix of organs taken from two or more different beings. The term itself comes from Greek *chimaira,* a mythological monster with a lion's head, a goat's body and a serpents tail.

Real Hybrids

Hybrids in nature are very rare, especially among mammals. They occur when genetically similar animals are forced to live in close proximity to one another. Normally, every species has its own set of mating rituals, pheromones and other forms of "sex talk" which do not attract members of other species. However, if no suitable mates from the own group are present crossbreeding may occur. Therefore, hybrid animals are sometimes reported in zoos when different animal groups were kept in the same enclosure.

Crossbreeds are usually named by building a portmanteau (a condensation of two words into one) out of the parent animals' names, starting with the male animal. The zeedonk (also called zonkey) for example is the product of a male zebra and a female donkey while the zorse is a combination of male zebra and female horse. Exceptions to this convention are numerous though. The mule, a mix of male donkey and female horse (the name itself derives from lat. *mulus* = hybrid) and the hinny (male horse, female donkey) are very popular examples for this[1].

Sterility often occurs in hybrids due to an odd number of chromosomes. Chromosome pairs need to be able to split evenly in order to produce germ cells (like eggs and sperm) that have a complete set of genetic information. For example, a horse has 64 chromosomes (32 chromosome pairs) while a donkey has 62 (31 pairs). The resulting mule has 63 chromosomes: 31 pairs and a single unpaired one. Because of this, the mule can't pass on all of its genetic information when reproducing with another mule; it needs matched chromosome pairs for that. It is therefore functionally sterile. There are, however, a few cases where female mules could be impregnated by donkeys or horses because they can provide the missing chromosomes[2].

Crossbreeding among plants is a lot more common than among animals. Manually crossing plants in order to generate

new varieties with desirable traits has been common practice in agriculture. In fact, most modern crops are hybrids and nearly all of them are fertile. Notable exceptions to this are cultivated bananas, red grapes, and seedless watermelon. Due to a mismatch of chromosomes, none of these hybrids develops functional seeds even though they still bear fruit after pollination. Such plants are therefore propagated vegetatively by planting sucker sprouts or corms.

Real Chimeras

Natural chimeras are even more rare. One of very few known examples is tetragametic chimerism which also occurs in humans. It starts with two ova being fertilized by one sperm each -- a condition which usually leads to non-identical twins. If these ova merge, however, they create a single chimera instead of two organisms. All organs are mixed together from either of the twins and they have their own genetic identity. Such a "merged twin" often shows patchy skin, -hair or -eye pigmentation and sometimes hermaphroditism (if the original twins were of different sexes). These patients have effectively two different genomes which can lead to false diagnosis and other more mundane problems after a genetic screening [3]. Most of the time when the term chimera is used, however, it refers to artificially created combinations of cells from different sources and the organism resulting thereof.

Chimp-Human Hybrids: Barry White And Champagne?

We, *Homo sapiens* belong to the genus *Homo* and share this genus with a few other species: *Homo erectus, Homo ergaster, Homo rudolfensis, Homo neanderthalensis,* and *Homo habilis,* all of them already extinct. Some scientists argue that chimpanzees should belong to our genus too, due to the high degree of genetic similarity between them and us [4]. Recent work estimates the DNA sequence overlap to about 94-98% for coding sequences (most of the DNA is non-coding which means it does not have genes in it). This is more than for other animals that were grouped together. So why are humans still separated from chimps when it comes to taxonomy? One of the reasons for that is a gene called FOXP2 which seems to be responsible for our highly developed language skills and may be one major factor (besides increasing numbers of neurons) that changed our evolution to become the most intelligent animal on the planet. Other animals do possess this gene, but our version is slightly different and allows us to express ourselves in a lot more subtle ways. While genetics play the major role in what organisms look like, even a very small change in genetic information can make a big difference.

While it is widely believed that "man derives from ape," recent studies show that man actually derived from a protohuman-protochimpanzee hybrid. Genetic analysis of our DNA reveals that our ancestors parted from the ancestor of chimpanzees about 10 million years ago, but still exchanged genes for another four million years (which means they interbred). The new species that resulted out of this genetic mix finally became *Homo sapiens:* us [5]. Judging from this, we can at least say that it was once possible for protohumans and protochimpanzees to mate.

There are only a few documented cases where scientists tried to cross humans with chimps and most of them are highly unreliable or only based on obscure sources. One of the most popular (and also most authentic) story is about Ilya Ivanovich Ivanov. He was a russian scientist who tried to artificially inseminate female chimps with human sperm in the 1920s in order to create human-ape hybrids. Since none of his experiments showed positive results he later changed his approach and tried to use sperm from male chimpanzees on female volunteers. However, his work was

Genomic Imprinting

A few genes in our genome do have a chemical switch that can be turned on or off depending on if the genetic material comes from a male or a female. Most of these factors have to do with development of the embryo and placental growth. For instance, in lion-tiger hybrids (ligers) the male lion has a gene to up regulate growth of its embryo to ensure that his will out-compete the others in the womb (lions can get pregnant from more than one male at the same time). The female lion, however has a counter-gene to ensure the survival of all the embryos (and eventually her own) by down-regulating growth. Tigers don't have to deal with this kind of problem because they aren't herd animals and always just have a single mate -- they lack this counter-growth regulation. Therefore, ligers are the largest felines on earth -- they can weight up to 1,100 pounds!

stopped because of political changes; he was arrested and sent to exile in Kazakhstan where he died a few years later.

Other, less documented reports from Italy and China around the 1990s claim that scientist have been successful in creating a viable embryo out of human sperm and chimp eggs but they were forced to destroy it. The results were never published. Until now there is no evidence that a chimpanzee-human hybrid ever existed. It is therefore unlikely that a modern human could impregnate a chimpanzee (or vice versa) in the normal way and result in healthy offspring -- even when taking soul music and lots of beverage into account.

The Genetic Date Doctor

As soon as we get in the area of un-natural reproduction this picture changes slightly. From manually injecting genetic material into oozytes up to transporting genes from one organism to another -- a wide range of technologies exists that can produce a hybrid. Transgenic organisms, for instance, are a combination of genetic material from various sources. These sources can be as different as a bacterium and a plant: "Bt corn," for example, is corn with a foreign gene that was taken from Bacillus thuringensis (a bacterium) and integrated into the plant's DNA. This causes the corn to produce a toxin which increases its resistance to insects but is not poisonous to humans.

Scientists have already been able to achieve such things as implant human neurons into embryonic ape brains or mice which effectively results in a human-chimp or -mouse chimeras. In these experiments the brain developed normally until the chimera was destroyed. Now there are plans to grow mice with complete brains derived from human neurons to study neuro-degenerative diseases. Another seemingly bizarre vision is to create genetically altered mice which produce human sperm and human eggs. This way, two mice would be able to produce a human blastocyst (one of the first steps in embryonal development) which could then be used for stem cell harvesting[6].

A Closer Look

If we assume that we could overcome all the obstacles to create human-ape hybrids, what should we expect from this new specimen? Judging from the way that chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*) and *Homo sapiens* differ from one another[7] we can predict the following:

Physical Strength

Ordinary chimps are roughly five to seven times stronger than a human (though that may not translate directly to a strength score five to seven times higher in your game system of choice). When normalized to size and taking reduced strength due to changes in genetic profile into account, our hybrid would probably be in the range of at least two to four times stronger.

Looks

Any chimp-human combination would stand out in a crowd of people and be easily recognized in broad daylight. Judging from the appearance of most hybrid animals, a humanzee (male human/female chimp hybrid) or chuman (male chimp/female human) would resemble a short, upright walking hairy human with ape-like facial features. The arms would be about 10-30% longer than human arms. Legs would be shorter and the chimp-like skeletal structure will lead to a somewhat hunched position when going upright. If fertile, childbirth could be problematic due to the changed anatomy of the pelvis.

Bone Density

The bones of chimpanzees are a lot more dense than ours which leads to a more powerful skeleton and greatly reduced likeliness of broken bones after injury. The drawback of this is that chimpanzees can't swim; they are not buoyant. If the hybrid shares these traits he will have a hard time staying afloat, but he would also benefit from very dense bone

structure and increased resistance against blunt trauma.

Age

There should be little difference when it comes to the effects of aging, compared to a normal human. While chimpanzees only live about 40 years in the wild, they can reach ages of 70+ in captivity. It seems reasonable to assume that a hybrid will have the same natural lifespan that we have. Due to a mutation in a gene, humans are less prone to developing Alzheimer's disease than chimpanzees are. Chimp half-bloods might therefore show signs of neuronal degeneration earlier and more often than their human cousins of the same age.

Intelligence

Although chimps are very smart animals they are not capable of many intellectual tasks that seem basic to us. Most noticeable are the abilities to process and interpret abstract information and language skills. An average human for example, has a vocabulary of about 9,000 words. Even the smartest chimpanzee so far could only learn a maximum of around 250 words (in American Sign Language). Our hybrid will display learning difficulties and severe language problems. In general, the IQ score will be far below the human average.

Perception

All primates possess full-color vision. In the course of evolution they slowly traded this ability against a few genes related to the sense of smell. Since this trend is more prominent in *Homo sapiens* than in *Pan troglodytes,* chimpanzees have a more sensitive olfactory system. We make up for this deficit with a better sense of hearing. A hybrid would possibly show heightened perception in all these areas.

Digestion and Metabolism

Chimps show some differences in utilizing proteins as a food source and they seem to lack two genes involved in the development of an important cardio-protective factor in fat metabolism (APOL1 and APOL4, parts of high density lipoprotein). This may lead to problems like cardiovascular disease as soon as their diet is switched from mostly fruit and vegetables to food with high-fat and high-sugar content, which is common in a western diet.

High Probability Of Being Sterile

While humans have 46 chromosomes (23 pairs) members of the *Pan* genus have 48. This does not necessarily have to lead to sterility, but in most cases in nature where hybrids occur a mismatch in chromosomes leads to sterile offspring.

Immune System

Our relatives' immune system works slightly differently than our own. Chimps are immune to malaria while, through the course of evolution, humans developed increased resistance against tuberculosis or the parasite causing the sleeping disease. If we assume that crossbreeding would lead to hybrid vigor this could mean robust health and overall physical fitness for the hybrid.

Dawn of a new species?

Now that we have our new specimen, what are the parameters for it to become an entire new species (and take over the world and some such)?

First there are ecological factors. Most organisms are well adapted to their

Hybrid Vigor

Hybrid vigor (also called heterosis) is an effect of increased evolutionary fitness or strength in a hybrid. In this case the descendant is often stronger or better at something than the two parent organisms are. A reason for this is thought to be a more diverse genome

environment. This includes means to gather available food sources, defense mechanisms against predators, and physical attributes for survival in harsh terrain. For example, a cross between a white butterfly (which is able to camouflage against birch trees) and a green butterfly (able to hide in grass) couldn't hide successfully in either of these places, even though his instincts would tell him to do so. As another example, a lion whose main power lies in strength and a cheetah who has to be fast to hunt his prey probably wouldn't produce ecologically successful offspring because the resulting hybrid would not be strong enough to hunt the large herbivores of the steppe and too slow to hunt antelopes. If the new species can't utilize its environment better than others it will not be successful in the long run of evolution.

Second, there are biological factors. While individuals within one species are sexually compatible and can exchange genetic information, the production of viable non-sterile offspring gets more unlikely the less related the organisms are. Species identity ("like attracts like") plays a major role. Every species has distinct mating rituals, ways of communication, social structures, and so on. Most of these factors depend on the genetic profile and are therefore set for a given species.

Since chumans or humanzees will be of high physical strength but low intelligence it is hard to imagine a situation where they could be a real threat for a modern civilization unless other factors (like a virus that targets only humans for instance) comes into play.

and therefore a higher possibility to adapt to various environments. For example hybrid corn (which is the commonly used form in agriculture) readily outgrows its natural relatives, canine mongrels are more healthy and and stable than purebreds, and so forth. There is some speculation that heterosis might also be an inter-species effect in humans. A few studies suggest that children of mixed ethnicity score higher in intelligence tests than their cousins of either ethnicity alone[8]. This issue, however, is vigorously discussed and is a source of strong controversies among scientists.

After a few million years, in case the new species has time to evolve in isolation and there is selection pressure similar to what we experienced in our development, they could be much more of a threat. Their intelligence levels would slowly rise and they would become more human-like and therefore more dangerous.

Hybrids In Fantasy Settings

Most half-blood races in the Fantasy genre are best described as hybrids while some "monsters" like the sphinx (lion with a human head) show distinct characteristics of chimeras.

Since half-bloods in fantasy are much more common than in reality there has to be a factor that makes it easier for all these races to crossbreed. Because, judging from the physiological differences, most races would be genetically incompatible with humans and could not produce hybrids. Even those which are relatively similar (say, elves and humans) might produce sterile offspring.

If we assume that fantasy-world biology works the way it does in our world, technologically (or magically) advanced civilizations are a good explanation for the existence of almost any hybrid. The palette of possibilities ranges from merging two species up to complete genomic construction from scratch.

If, however, biology works entirely differently, then the material that contains our genetic information does not have to be DNA. It could be a magic aura, soul essence, or something else along these lines. interbreeding could then resemble the mixing of two different colors and would always produce a hybrid. In this case, there needs to be non-genetic factor that keeps species separate. Otherwise they would all merge into a single homogeneous mixture-race.

Notes

- [1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mule
- [2] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/2290491.stm
- [3] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lydia_Fairchild

- [4] http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2003/05/0520_030520_chimpanzees.html
- [5] Genetic evidence for complex speciation of humans and chimpanzees, Nature 441, 1103-1108 (29 June 2006)
- [6] http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2005/01/0125_050125_chimeras.html
- [7] Initial sequence of the chimpanzee genome and comparison with the human genome, Nature 437, 69-87 (1 September 2005)
- [8] Nagoshi and Johnson 1986 "The ubiquity of g." Personality and Individual Differences 7: 201-207.

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@yahoogroups.com, and the Omniscient Eye might answer it!

Brittina Montaigne

for *GURPS Space*

by Michael Brown

Captain Nushu sat at his console cursing as he waited for the inevitable. The sleek ship had intercepted his starliner, blasted his drives offline with expert precision, and Security was warning that armed boarders were taking passengers' valuables. One group was headed for the bridge.

Minutes later, the bridge's hatch flared around the edges, the pieces falling to the floor with dull thuds. Several armored intruders leaped inside, brandishing guns, followed by a gorgeous, flamboyantly dressed woman who gusted in, cast an appreciative glance at the scene, then smilingly approached Nushu with outstretched hand.

"Brittina Montaigne, And you are . . . ?"

But Nushu was in no mood for pleasantries. "Look, we don't want trouble with pirates . . ."

Brittina looked genuinely hurt. "Pirates, captain? How . . . pedestrian." The smile returned as she shook her head. "Our . . . wealth facilitation service . . . will certainly put your valuables to good use, but there's a more important reason we're here."

Nushu stared in puzzlement. Brittina's eyes twinkled as she answered his unvoiced question:

"My crew and I would like to invite you all to a little . . . presentation," she said, fingering a small object around her neck Nushu knew to be a religious symbol.

Brittina Montaigne is an interstellar corsair who preys upon rich commercial vessels. Brittina is not solely motivated by money, however; her religious fervor drives her to seek out and convert others to her faith by whatever means. In a sense, she plunders not only valuables, but convictions as well.

Brittina is suitable for use in an ongoing *GURPS Space* campaign. With some tweaking, she can also be used in a *Transhuman Space, GURPS Terradyne,* or *GURPS Traveller* campaign. For *GURPS Space* purposes, Brittina is assumed to inhabit a setting of Tech level 10.

Background

Brittina was born on Earth, one of many unfortunates bred in the slums just outside the planet's gleaming major starport. Orphaned at a young age, her childhood was spent in a world of vice and violence. She had a police record by the time she turned 14.

Her life changed one night through an act of brutality. Accused of robbing an aristocrat who had been slumming in the startown, she was badly beaten by the man's bodyguards and left for dead in an alley. As she lay semi-conscious, a stranger aided her, staying with her until help arrived and speaking with her about the direction her life had taken and her plans for the future. The conversation made Brittina question everything that had happened in her life thus far, and the stranger challenged her to seek more answers later. The responding medics, seeing no one else in the alley despite Brittina's insistence, attributed the stranger's presence as just a delusion.

After a stay in the hospital, Brittina took up the stranger's challenge and began seeking answers. Her search led her to a local religious institution, where she began studies in earnest. Several years later, she emerged as a zealous proponent of her new faith, and began a series of "presentations," as she called them, to try and spread the word. Her efforts met

with indifference at best, and she viewed society as being too jaded to listen.

Frustration set in, and with it ennui, when a chance meeting sent Brittina's life in another direction. While traveling by starliner to another planet to seek new opportunities, pirates attacked. The corsairs weren't very bright -- Brittina easily persuaded them not to harm anyone -- but they gave her an idea. Convincing the pirate captain to take her on ostensibly as a hostage, Brittina introduced the crew to her religion, then induced her new supporters to mutiny and install her as captain. With a zealous crew and use of a hand-me-down armed merchant ship, she set out to win new converts through piracy.

Today, Brittina and her crew prowl interstellar space in their ship, the *Message,* searching for carefully chosen victims to rob and convert. Her conversion rate is actually rather low -- few choose to follow her faith -- but those she does convert tend to be very ardent believers.

Appearance

Brittina is a physically imposing but beautiful female Human. Brittina stands 6' tall and weighs 130 lbs. under 1g. She often wears heels that add several more inches of height. She has unblemished coffee-and-cream skin, brown eyes and thick black hair that she keeps well groomed. She dresses flamboyantly, but tastefully, and always on the cutting edge of fashion. Although approaching 50, Brittina appears much younger.

Personality

Even more imposing than Brittina's appearance is her personality. Her religious zeal combines with her natural charisma and beauty to great effect. She knows exactly how to take over a room, disarm naysayers, and dispel unbelief. And if things get out of hand, well, there's always her loyal crew.

Brittina can turn on the charm when necessary, especially when her plans call for stealth and social engineering. She is equally comfortable dealing with those of high and low status and has an uncanny ability to scope out victims with high payoff potential and low risk.

Although she is willing to commit acts of piracy, Brittina holds to strict standards of conduct. She strives to safeguard children and the elderly, and goes out of her way to avoid killing. Although she carries a small pistol, the number of times she has actually had to use it can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

Because she sees her actions as stemming from religious conviction, Brittina does not view what she does as piracy. In fact, she hates the term "pirate" and is quick to correct those who call her one with a colorful euphemism, such as "wealth facilitator," "affluence expeditor," or "resource reallocator." She tolerates no insults to her religion, however, and deals harshly with those who do.

Brittina can analyze a situation and devise a plan to deal with it. She tries to research her targets thoroughly before hitting them, but realizes that some opportunities are best seized on the spur of the moment. She also knows when to cut her losses and run. Her natural intuition and a fair amount of luck have helped her evade capture so far.

Brittina's Crew

Brittina "inherited" her 20-man ship's crew after she converted them and induced them to depose the previous captain. They are staunchly loyal to Brittina, trust her insights and obey her without question. She, in turn, goes to great lengths to ensure their happiness and loyalty. They have adopted her standards of conduct and will refrain from harming innocents or killing, although they quickly revert to their old ways if Brittina is threatened.

The crew also doubles as her bodyguards and each member is cross-trained in multiple ship's duties.

Stats for the crew are not presented here to give the GM maximum flexibility in NPC creation. Each should be built on

75-100 points and equipped with body armor and assault-type weapons.

Brittina's ship is a converted merchant ship, of a common sort found in whatever universe the GM sets her in. Brittina has never asked about the circumstances of how the ship ended up in corsair hands, but she has renamed the craft the *Message* in light of her self-imposed mission.

Brittina in the Campaign

Brittina and her crew do not have a static base, operating completely out of the *Message.* She avoids areas with heavy ship traffic and the attendant law enforcement patrols and stays on the move, never hitting the same system twice in a row. Within these guidelines, the GM can arrange an encounter with this flamboyant corsair almost anywhere. The easiest way is for the players to carry a valuable cargo with inadequate security. They will be disabled, boarded, robbed, and then forced to hear a sermon, wherein Brittina will hard-sell her religion and urge the PCs to join the faith.

Brittina makes a suitable Ally or Contact for those PCs who flirt with the wrong side of the law, as long as the alliance is only temporary and carries no hint of betrayal. As a Contact, she is worth 2 points (Criminal (Pirate) Contact, effective skill 15, usually reliable, available on 6 or less). She may also owe one of the PCs a Favor at a cost of 1 point.

Despite her scruples, Brittina is as deadly an enemy as they come. While she is loathe to kill, her crew has no such compunctions when it comes to their leader's unhappiness. And just because she avoids killing doesn't mean she won't maroon enemies somewhere, or drop discreet hints as to their locations to others looking for them.

PC law enforcers may be given the assignment of bringing Brittina and her crew to heel, especially if in the course of her robberies, she harms someone or makes off with important government property. Or if she is caught, PC attorneys may handle the case for or against her.

The GM should select Brittina's religion, based on the standards of the campaign and the comfort level of the players. There are of course many real life religions to choose from, or the GM can make one up, using GURPS Religion as a guide.

GURPS Third Edition

Brittina Montaigne   *150 points*

Attributes: **ST** 10 [0]; **DX** 12 [20]; **IQ** 13 [30]; **HT** 11 [10].
Speed 5.75, Dodge 5.

Advantages: Ally Group (20 pirates) [20]; Charisma+3 [15]; Appearance: Very Beautiful [25]; Fashion Sense [5]; Intuition [15]; Luck [15].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10]; Enemy (Star Patrol or equivalent; 6 or less) [-20]; Fanaticism [-15]; Reputation (Notorious "Converting Pirate": -4 from passenger line executives) [-10].

Quirks: Observes religious rites frequently [-1]; Uses colorful euphemisms to describe her robberies [-1]; Hates being called a pirate [-1]; Imaginative [-1]; Flamboyant but tasteful dresser [-1]

Skills: Bard-16# [2]; Carousing-11 [2]; Computer Operations/10-13 [1]; Detect Lies-12 [2]; Electronics Operations (Communications)-13 [2]; Free Fall-12 [2]; Guns (Pistol)-15* [2]; Heraldry (Ship's Markings)-13 [2]; Intimidation-15 [6]; Knife-12 [1]; Leadership-16# [2]; Psychology-13 [4]; Scrounging-13 [1]; Sex Appeal-13 [8]; Streetwise-14 [4]; Tactics-14 [6]; Theology-12 [2]; Traffic Analysis-13 [4]; Vacc Suit-13 [2].

* Includes +2 bonus for IQ 12+

GURPS Fourth Edition

Brittina Montaigne   *218 points*

Attributes: **ST** 10 [0]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 11 [20].
Dmg 1d-2/1d; Basic Lift 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 14 [5]; Per 15 [10]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 9.

Social Background: TL 10 [0]; CF Pirate [0]; Languages: Native* [0].

*GM's choice.

Advantages: Ally Group (20 pirates) [20]; Charisma 3 [15]; Fashion Sense [5]; Intuition [15]; Luck [15]; Very Beautiful (Impressive) [20]

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Gentleman's) [-10]; Enemy (Star Patrol or equivalent; arrest; 6 or less) [-15]; Fanaticism (to religion) [-15]; Reputation (notorious "Converting Pirate": -4 from passenger line executives; always) [-10]

Quirks: Observes religious rites frequently [-1]; Uses colorful euphemisms to describe her robberies [-1]; Hates being called a pirate [-1]; Imaginative [-1]; Flamboyant but tasteful dresser [-1]

Skills: Carousing-11 [1]; Computer Operations/10-13 [1]; Detect Lies-14 [2]; Electronics Operations (Communications)-13 [2]; Environment Suit/10 (Vacc Suit)-12 [2]; Free Fall-12 [2]; Guns (Pistol)-13 [2]; Heraldry (Ship's Markings)-13 [2]; Intelligence Analysis/10 (Traffic Analysis)-13 [4]; Intimidation-15 [4]; Knife-12 [1]; Leadership-16# [2] ; Psychology-13 [4]; Public Speaking-16# [2]; Scrounging-15 [1]; Sex Appeal-13 [8]; Streetwise-14 [4]; Tactics-14 [12]; Theology-12 [2]

Includes +3 Charisma bonus

Weapons and Armor: Brittina favors concealable firearms for personal defense, such as derringers and snub pistols. Although she does not use obvious body armor, most of her clothing has a bullet-resistant or laser-reflective lining.

Conversions

For use in *Transhuman Space, GURPS Terradyne,* or *GURPS Space* campaigns set entirely within the Solar system, Brittina and her crew will not need to change much. Just make sure the *Message* isn't FTL-capable. For the *Fourth Edition* version, tie her Cultural Familiarity down to a specific nation or organization.

In the *GURPS Traveller* universe, Brittina as a native-born Terran would be a purebred Solomani, although she would not accept the dogma of the Solomani Movement (see p. GT60-63). The *Message* is a jump-capable starship converted from a merchant or law enforcement vessel. Her enemy becomes the Third Imperium and/or the Solomani Confederation. The Corsair template (p. GT90) can represent her crew's stats and can allow the GM to customize her further for a *Traveller* setting.

Solomon's Ring

for *GURPS*

by James L. Cambias

One of the most powerful magical artifacts in history, the Ring of King Solomon has been the object of continual searches both in the mundane world and by magical means. So far it remains hidden.

The King

Solomon, of course, was the Old Testament king of the Israelites, who probably ruled about 970 to 928 B.C. He was the son of David and Bathsheba. In the Bible, Solomon is portrayed as wise and wealthy, the builder of the great Temple in Jerusalem. His reign is remembered as a Golden Age for the kingdom of Israel. Solomon's proverbial wisdom was amplified in subsequent Jewish, Christian, and Muslim tradition; he was portrayed as superhumanly knowledgeable, an authority on all things. Occultists cited Solomon as being the ultimate human authority on magic and alchemy. According to legend, he bound the *djinn* and built the Temple by the power of his magic -- in particular by the power of his Ring.

The Ring

The Ring was said to be a gift to Solomon from God, brought by the Archangel Raphael. According to the 19th-century French occultist Eliphas Levi, the ring is made of gold and silver, in the form of seven interbraided squares forming a circle. It holds two gems -- a white stone bearing the sign of the macrocosm set on one of the silver bands, and a red stone with the symbol of the microcosm set on a gold band. Wearing the ring with the white stone outward allows one to command spirits of light, while having the red one out gives power over spirits of darkness.

What makes the Ring so powerful is that it requires no ritual or preparation and can be used by non-mages as easily as mages. The wearer can simply summon and command spirits by speaking, and it appears that all spirit beings are *required* to obey. (It's not clear if actual *gods* could be commanded by the Ring, but there are plenty of occultists who would like to try it and find out.) The only limitation to its power is that the user must know the name of any spirit he wishes to call. A user who doesn't know any spirit names is limited to commanding whatever spirits he encounters -- though, of course, he could easily command a spirit to reveal its name, and thereby add it to the "buddy list" for future summoning.

In *GURPS Magic* terms, the Ring is a self-powered magic item which enables the wearer to cast Planar Summons, Summon Demon, Summon Elemental, and Summon Spirit, all with an effective skill level of 25. It has its own variant Powerstone enchantment, giving it a mana reserve of 100 points, which recharges fully each morning at dawn. The Ring's power cannot be used for other spells.

Since it once belonged to a revered king and prophet, and was possibly crafted by angels, the Ring is mystically significant in its own right. It gives its master an extra level of Magery -- but only when he actually wears the ring.

In *GURPS Cabal* terms, the Ring of Solomon is mystically aligned with the decans Iudal, Kurtael, and Sphandor. Any spell powered by those decans gets a +3 bonus if the caster wears the Ring. Because of the Ring's connection to an important figure in Jewish occult tradition, it may (at the GM's option) give the wearer the ability to freely enter and pass the Sephiroth.

Gamemasters should decide in advance what kind of supernatural beings are affected by the Ring's control of "spirits." The default assumption is that it controls angels, demons, *djinn*, spirits of the dead, and elementals. Gamemasters may

add or exclude faeries, pagan gods, the undead, astral beings, Lovecraftian horrors, beings of pure thought, space energy beings, Ascended Masters, Arisians, and whatever other possible "spirits" are likely to turn up in the campaign.

Finding the Ring

The Ring was owned by Solomon, but after his death its fate becomes unclear. According to some accounts the Ring was stored in the Ark of the Covenant, which would make the owner of that object supremely powerful. If it was in the Temple at Jerusalem, then it is curious nobody used the Ring to stop the Roman invasion which ultimately sacked and destroyed the Temple itself. If the Romans took it, the Ring may explain how their empire survived such a long time and achieved such tremendous worldly power. It probably passed out of Roman hands before the fall of the Empire.

After that it may have fallen into the hands of various Germanic or Norse tribes, as loot from their raids and conquests in Roman territory. The entire legend-cycle of the Ring of the Nibelungs may refer to Solomon's Ring, in which case it may rest today at the bottom of the Rhine, guarded by powerful water elementals. Norsemen ranged from North America to the Urals, and could have left the Ring anywhere.

If the Ring was kept by the Emperors of the Eastern Roman Empire (and the stories of the Emperor Justinian trafficking with demons may support that), the Ring presumably stayed in Byzantium until the coming of the Turks. It could be in some hidden Greek monastery, or among the treasures of the Ottoman conquerors of Constantinople.

Alternately, the Ring may have remained hidden on the site of Solomon's Temple, in which case the Knights Templar could have rediscovered it during the period they controlled the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The Ring could then be the Big Secret of the Templars. Templar control of Solomon's Ring might mean it's hidden in Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland, or a secret Templar refuge in North America -- or that it was handed over to their occasional allies the Assassins, which would put the Ring in Alamut Castle in Iran (or in some hidden Mongol treasure-hoard after they sacked Alamut). It may even still be hidden under the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, in the fabled Well of Souls.

As with any magical item of power, adventures involving the Ring of Solomon are likely to center on finding it or getting it away from bad guys. It's especially appropriate for scenarios in which the heroes don't know what they have -- the historical possibilities outlined above mean the Ring could be found anywhere from Minnesota to Beijing. A group of PCs can be plagued by magically-aided burglary and assassination attempts for a long time before they realize that queer old ring is the reason for it all.

The people trying to get the Ring can be occult bad guys, The Cabal, spirits who want to destroy it to preserve their freedom, angels who want to take it back to Heaven, Kabalists, the royal house of Ethiopia, and, of course, the Templars. Or all of them at once!

Alternate Rings

Of course, the Ring doesn't have to be a supremely powerful magic item just because everyone thinks that's what it is. Here are some other possibilities.

Alien Communicator: Maybe when Solomon was commanding spirits he was really just asking his pyramid-building alien buddies for help. Antigrav beams built the Temple and orbital death rays defeated Solomon's foes. The Ring's gems hold one end of a submicroscopic interstellar wormhole, plus transmitting and receiving equipment. Will the aliens still come if you call?

Psionic Amplifier: In the ancient world, all magical effects were attributed to spirits. But Solomon has a reputation for incredible wisdom and insight -- was he psionic as well? The Ring might have been a focus or amplifier device for psi powers. It would increase any psi power by a good 10 levels, but the wearer uses his own skill. The question of who *made* the Ring could be very

One Ring to Rule Them All?

It is interesting to note that the scholar and author J.R.R. Tolkein wrote an epic fantasy about the quest to find and destroy a Ring suspiciously similar to Solomon's. Tolkein spent many years studying ancient texts in a variety of obscure European languages, and as an English Catholic and Oxford don may have been connected to the surviving

important.

Sacred Item: The legends are literally Gospel truth -- Solomon's power all came from the favor of God, and the Ring was simply an easy way for the King to communicate with the Lord. This is probably the most dangerous variant of the Ring, as anyone without the True Faith advantage (or the bloodline of Hebrew kings) may not be able to withstand direct contact with the Divine. They may pass out, undergo sudden religious conversions, or go mad. (Charitable GMs should reserve *Raiders*-style exploding head effects for truly evil characters who put on the ring.)

Adventure Seeds

The Ring of Truth

In the modern world, the heroes encounter a crackpot who is convinced that some prominent individual (a politician, tycoon, or celebrity) is secretly the owner of the Ring. The crackpot even has some blurry photos of the subject of his obsession, which seem to show a strange-looking ring on that person's hand. Utterly ridiculous -- until the crackpot is torn apart by unseen assailants. Can a group of ordinary people find a way to defeat the Master of the Ring?

Three-Ring Circus

Eliphas Levi's description of the Ring led a clever Parisian jeweler to create an unknown number of duplicate Rings in the late 19th century. Now someone is tracking down every ring which matches that description, and won't stop until he finds the real one (if it even exists). The heroes have a duplicate ring, presumably not the real one. Will they join in the hunt to keep a murderous megalomaniac from getting ultimate power? Are they willing to kill for it themselves?

Ring Around The Rosicrucian

A recent archaeological find in the Middle East includes an extremely well-preserved ring which exactly matches the description of Solomon's Ring. The entire global occult underground are scrambling to be the first to get possession of it. But what if the whole thing is a scam -- a kind of occult roach motel designed to draw all the most knowledgeable and unscrupulous operators in the magica world into a trap? Old enemies may have to work together against their unknown foe, with constant betrayals and shifts in allegiance the order of the day.

Jacobite Templars. There are intriguing hints of this in his masterwork *The Lord of the Rings.* Do Tolkein's Rangers represent the Templars or the *Prieure de Sion* (hidden guardians of a secret royal lineage)? Is the best-known fantasy epic of our time really a coded guide to the Ring's true location? Or is it a warning that the Ring of Solomon must be destroyed lest it fall into the wrong hands?

American Hercules: John Henry

"John Henry was a very small boy
Fell on his mammy's knee
Picked up a hammer and a little piece of steel,
'Lord, a hammer'll be the death of me,
Lord, a hammer'll be the death of me.'"
-- Fiddlin' John Carson, "John Henry Blues" (1924)

Here's another in our American pantheon, a demigod of the "bottom tenth," a supreme power for the supremely powerless. The story of John Henry is perhaps the best-known American folk story, and is the most intensely studied ballad in American musicology. For laying down the tracks in this strange line, I owe a great deal to Brett Williams' superb *John Henry: A Bio-Bibliography* and more again to Norm Cohen's magnificent *Long Steel Rail: The Railroad in American Folksong.* But where I drill my holes, hopefully, is somewhere new. And also hopefully, the tunnel won't fall in while we're there.

"John Henry told his captain,
'Man ain't nothing but a man
And 'fore I'd let that steam drill beat me down,
I'll die with this hammer in my hand.'"
-- version of "John Henry" collected by Zora Neale Hurston (1935)

John Henry was a big, black giant of a man, "the singin'-est man you ever saw," capable of prodigious feats of strength. He was a giant even as a baby, eating solid food from the first day. Although he prophesied his own death from it, he worked as a "steel-drivin' man" on the railroad line up in the mountains, which meant he pounded steel drills into the rock with his twelve-pound hammer. (The holes would later be filled with explosives to blow the tunnel open.) Sometimes, he would use two nine-pound hammers at once, a thing only someone of John Henry's superlative strength, timing, and expertise could do. He had a woman, the lovely Polly Anne, who cooked food enough for an army to feed his immense appetite. She tried to stay true to him, but he loved his work more than he loved her, and rumor had it that Polly Anne was known to stray.

And it came to pass that the railroad company was up against it, with a tricky stretch of hard rock between it and golden dollars. A tunnel had to go through the mountain, and the captain of the railroad brought in a new-fangled steam drill to hammer through the mountain faster (and cheaper) than his work gang could. But when John Henry heard of the new drill, he laughed it to scorn and told the captain that he could drill faster and harder than any steam engine. So they set up a contest, John Henry against the machine, with not just John Henry's job, but the jobs of the whole work gang, on the line. For two days and two nights, the machine and John Henry drilled away at the side of the mountain, and on the morning of the third day, with John Henry winning by five feet of tunnel, the machine broke down and blew up. John Henry had drilled the farthest, but he dropped down and died on the spot "with his hammer in his hand." Polly Anne, who had come down to see the contest as word spread, gave him his last drink of cold water, and took his body away in a boxcar, because John Henry was too big for any coffin.

"John Henry was hammering on the right side,
The big steam drill on the left.
Before that steam drill could beat him down,
He hammered his fool self to death."
-- W.T. Blankenship, "John Henry, the Steel Driving Man" (ca. 1915)

That's the version that I learned as a kid, from a mish-mosh of animated cartoons, New Christy Minstrels albums, Johnny Cash, and brightly colored library books. Virtually everything in it comes originally from one of the fifty or so versions of the "John Henry" ballad, the dozen or so versions of "The Death of John Henry," or from the related "hammer songs" sung by steel-drivers to keep time while they worked. The earliest hammer song -- "This ole hammer killed John Henry, Drivin' steel, baby, drivin' steel" -- dates back to 1905 in east Tennessee. The first evidence of the

ballad comes from western North Carolina in 1909, a single couplet: "Johnie Henry was a hard-workin' man, He died with his hammer in his hand." Fuller versions began appearing in print starting with Blankenship's Alabama broadside and a scholarly transcription by John Lomax in 1915. In 1924, Fiddlin' John Carson recorded the first version of "John Henry Blues," for the Okeh Phonograph Corporation. Even that early version has John Henry's infant prophecy, the contest with the steam drill, Polly Ann (and another "woman in blue"), and John Henry's death. W.C. Handy and other blues pioneers picked up on "John Henry" as well; some scholars even trace the phrase "rock and roll" to the ballad, since the "shaker" who holds the drill for John Henry to strike has to rock and roll it to shake the dust out of the shaft.

One interesting thing about this early phase is how much of it was white. White miners sang the 1905 version, apparently under the impression that John Henry was a white man, and the ballad early on shows influences from Scottish songs and English narrative structure. The tune was from an English folk song, "Earl Brand." Blankenship was not only a terrible poet but a white man, although Lomax' contemporary version is collected from African-American sources. "John Henry" had just as strong a place in "hillbilly" (country music) repertoires as he did on "race records," blues recorded for black folk. (Some versions split the difference, calling him a mulatto, or making Polly Anne "a blue-eyed girl.") And black folk knew him only through records and songs, not in tales or stories. Anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, who certainly was in a position to know, insisted that "John Henry has no place in Negro folk-lore except in this one [song]." That was true in 1935 when she wrote it. But Roark Bradford published a "Paul Bunyanized" novel about John Henry in 1931 (and Henry Ford of all people serialized part of it), and later story-tellers added tall stories of their own to John Henry's reputation. So John Henry wound up stoking on the steamboat *Robert E. Lee* or building levees in New Orleans in a day or spitting to put out fires or wrestling wildcats or, by the 1970s, playing baseball with [Paul Bunyan](#).

"When Henry was 'tween them mountains
The captain saw him goin' down.
He supplied to Henry one day,
Tried to pacify his mind,
Says 'Henry you knows you's a natural man.'"
-- version of "John Henry" recorded by Harold Courlander (1950)

But like [Robin Hood](#) and King Arthur, there just may be a historical John Henry casting all those long shadows. The more restrained ballad claims for John Henry's fatal prowess -- fourteen feet of shaft drilled in 35 minutes -- would be record-breaking if true, but not superhuman. The search is not made easier by the fact that "John" and "Henry" were the two most common black male names in the Reconstruction South, and there were eleven "John Henrys" on the rolls of free black householders as early as 1830. Leaving aside arguments for Kentucky, Georgia, and Jamaica of all places, there are three solid contenders. In the 1920s, rival folklorists Guy Johnson and Louis Chappell both settled on the Big Bend tunnel (drilled between 1870 and 1872) in West Virginia, which had the advantage of being on "the C&O line." Indeed, many versions of the ballad mention the "Big Bend Tunnel" specifically, and both Johnson and Chappell managed to collect a good number of personal testimonies of Big Bend miners who claimed to have known about the contest or known of John Henry. They set the date of the contest in 1871, although the complete absence of any evidence that the C&O used steam drills on the Big Bend Tunnel is one flaw (along with the not insignificant inconsistencies in the hearsay testimony) with this solution.

In 2002, folklorist John Garst plumped for a theory discarded by Johnson and Chappell, which places John Henry on the *C&W* line in Alabama, specifically the Oak Mountain Tunnel near Dunnavant (or possibly the Coosa Tunnel near Leeds). He, unlike Johnson and Chappell, found a partial "John Henry," one Henry Dabney, a former slave who shares a name with the "Captain Dabner" or "Dabney" who in some versions of the ballad was John Henry's master back in slavery days. Captain Dabney was, as it turns out, the chief construction engineer on the C&W. He also has personal testimony (including from a claimed eyewitness, C.C. Spencer) and local legend to back him up, and sets the date of the contest on September 20, 1887. Although there's no evidence (except Spencer's letter) that Henry Dabney was named John or drove steel, he did have a wife Margaret, who could have become the otherwise-inexplicable "Maggadee" ("Maggie D" for "Dabney") in one version of the ballad.

In 2005, the historian Scott Reynolds Nelson published a new theory that John Henry was actually "John William Henry," a black convict laborer leased out by the C&O railroad to work on the Lewis Tunnel in the 1870s, where there

were actually steam drills. Nelson found holes in the record implying that John William Henry (along with at least 400 other convicts) died before 1874 while working on the railroad, and suspects the cause was silicosis from the dust thrown up by the primitive steam drills. Thus, the steam drill killed John Henry, but not as the result of a dramatic contest. The trouble here is that his "John Henry" is listed as 5 foot 1, which is a little small for a legendary giant. Also, there's no evidence that John William Henry ever worked as a steel driver, and Lewis Tunnel, unlike the Big Bend and Coosa Tunnels, has no John Henry after-the-fact testimony, or even legend, attached to it.

"All de womens in de wes',
When dey heared of John Henry's death,
Stood in de rain, flagged de eas'-boun' train,
Goin' where John Henry fell dead,
Lawd, Lawd, goin' where John Henry fell dead."
-- version of "John Henry" collected by John and Alan Lomax (1934)

And it is the legend that concerns us here, and given that it only had about three generations to grow before being "fixed" by records and Bradford Roark's novel, it is a surprisingly varied and rich one. Magical elements enter it fairly early, from John Henry's infantile premonition of his fate to actually being "born with a hammer in his hand." In a 1925 version, he visits a land overflowing with more food than he can eat, the [Big Rock Candy Mountain], in other words. In other versions, John Henry has the "blue gums of a conjure man," and his strength comes from being "double-jointed," which add an eerie frisson of alienness to the ostensibly pure archetype of humanity, "just a natural man."

But natural or supernatural, he is a mythic hero in the best sense. The parallels with Ogoun, the Voudun smith-loa -- fire and steel and hammers -- are inescapable, but there's much more. Like Heracles with his snake, he holds the instrument of his death as a baby, and like Heracles sexual jealousy or exhaustion may have played a part in it. (One doesn't have to be a Freudian like Alan Lomax to think that sometimes hammering is more than just, well, hammering.) Like Samson, in some versions John Henry is struck blind, or he caves in the mountain with his drilling. He likewise shares Samson's connection with a whore -- in one version of the ballad, John Henry's woman is named "Mary Magdalene." Even when Polly Anne is there, she is sometimes balanced by a "Witching Woman" who may be the "woman in blue" who seduces John Henry and weeps at his death far from her, or the midwife who delivers him, or both. The Nineve parallel obtrudes here, and the Arthurian aspect of John Henry becomes even stronger when you read the Lomaxes' version above, about the "women in the west" associated with water ("stood in de rain") who travel to the site of his death. Again, like Arthur, he often gives last orders for the disposal of his hammer in water, and also like Arthur, he dies with his society -- the steam drill comes anyway. Even better, some versions have John Henry taken up North (the equivalent of Avalon to black convict laborers, no doubt) to be healed by Polly Anne or the woman in blue or both. And if that isn't the afterlife you seek for John, well, his ghost (not John Henry [Pepper's Ghost]) haunts the Big Bend Tunnel to this day.

"Oh, they ain't no tale was ever wrote
'Bout Big John Henry that could start to tell
All the things that Big Boy knowed so well:
How he learned to whistle from the whippoorwills,
And turned the wheels whut ran the mills;
How the witches taught him how to cunjer,
And [cure] the colic and ride the thunder. . . ."
-- Margaret Walker, "Big John Henry" (1942)

The literary versions get even stranger. One James Cloyd Bowman also noticed the mythic parallels, publishing *John Henry: the Rambling Black Ulysses* in 1942. In this book, John Henry is a conjure baby, built out of [John the Conqueror] root and iron filings from a drill, set afloat on the bayou like Moses. Harold Felton's 1950 novel has John Henry born with a hammer in his hand under a blood red moon; he works as a fireman for Casey Jones, among other adventures. He gains a sidekick, his shaker Li'l Bill -- in Bradford's novel, he had an archenemy, a rival railroad worker named Sam. He even has a rival folktale -- John Harrington Cox, the first scholar to collect John Henry ballads, confused them with the overlapping ballads of "John Hardy." John Hardy is more of a Stagger Lee character,

who celebrates his gambling, whoring, and drinking and comes to a bad end on the gallows. The real John Hardy apparently tried to assume the mantle himself, confessing to Governor McCorkle of West Virginia before his 1894 execution that he had been the legendary "steel-driving man" of Big Bend.

"They took John Henry to the White House,
And buried him in the san',
And every locomotive come roarin' by,
Says there lays that steel drivin' man,
Says there lays that steel drivin' man."
-- Cincinnati version of "The Ballad of John Henry" (ca. 1925)

John Henry is a true-born prince of the American cantosphere, who shook off John Hardy, walked proud through the Big Rock Candy Mountain, and tied Paul Bunyan at baseball. As such, he deserves to be buried, as the Cincinnati version above has it, in the White House. Buzzkill Scott Nelson points out that the prison house at Richmond was a white house, but John Garst counters that "white road" is probably older, and could refer to the white gravel roads of Alabama. Better still is the still more obscure ballad term "smoky road," the railroad itself, the core and spine of the John Henry tale. Whether born in Alabama or West Virginia, the railroads carried John Henry from tunnel to tunnel, and every line became his home line. Like his father-uncle-cousin John the Conqueror, he travels on the "waves of sound," not Conquer John's drumming, but the clack of train wheels and the ringing of steel on steel and steel on stone. He is defeated by the machine, but lives by the machine -- the phonograph record and the railway again. And like all conjure men and tribal heroes, his power is in his name, which echoes far and wide in its own right. He has the name of a million black men, and of two mighty significant whites: the name of the South's other wounded king, [John Henry Holliday](#), and of its martyred *dux bellorum,* John Henry Kagi, who rode with John Brown in 1859. (There's another John Henry who [we've met](#) in connection with death on a railroad, John Henry Patterson.) Kagi was a blacksmith's son, born to the sound of ringing hammers, and a gunfighter like both John Hardy and John Henry Holliday. He disappeared in the raid on Harper's Ferry, just below the West Virginia mountains where -- maybe -- John Henry still lives.

Pyramid Review

Sudoku: The Card Game

Published by [Z-Man Games](#)

Designed by Reiner Knizia

Graphics by Joshua Cappel

54 cards (nine yellow, 45 blue), rules; boxed, two to five players; $15

If you've never tried your hand at the Sudoku puzzle in the "living" section of your local newspaper, you don't know what you're missing: tired eyes, an aching head, frustration, a torn up "living" section from your local newspaper . . . but help is on the way. *Sudoku: The Card Game* from Z-Man Games (the company distinction is worth making because more than one company is putting out board and card versions of this pastime) releases it from its one-solution limitation and turns it into a freeform mental endeavor.

The object of the game is to have the fewest points left in your penalty stack.

For those not familiar with the standard game: [Sudoku](#) has a set of three-by-three grids and asks you to fill the smaller boxes with numbers one through nine so that every line and column in a larger layout uses every number just once. In this game, a single yellow card is placed in the middle of the table. The remaining cards are shuffled and everyone is dealt a hand. Yellow cards are the points around which the rest of the game revolves. Blue cards are situated about the yellows.

You're not stuck making the same three-by-three grids -- not exactly, anyway. There are nine yellow cards (one with each digit), and you have to surround them with blues. Each number can only appear once in any set of nine cards, so the yellow "one" card can only have blue cards two through nine around it. The blues frame the yellows, so new yellow cards go on the other side and the two yellow cards "share" the blue cards between them.

Also like the newspaper puzzles, you can't have the same number twice on the same line, up and down or side to side, no matter what color the card is. You can spread your game all over the living room table if you like, but you're only going to get so far building in any direction without staggering the rows or columns. If you cannot play a card, or if you play one in the wrong place and an opponent catches you (and tripping up is actually pretty easy if you're not careful), you have to take a card into your penalty stack. Blue cards count for one point and yellow cards count for two, and whoever has the fewest points against him at the end of the game wins.

The cards are square, which makes shuffling slightly harder, but they're good material. The number graphics are somewhat annoying because they can look alike from some angles or when overlapped in your hand (they're stylized Asian characters). The box . . . if you have any valuables you need to secure, put them in this container and you'll never get them out again. The top and bottom are perfectly flush, making separation almost impossible without jamming your fingers in between them. On the other hand, if you're willing to fold your rules up, you can forgo the box and the entire thing fits into any pocket.

Not that you're going to need the rules for long. It should stick after the first game or two. The one area of uncertainty is whether you can continue the blue card pattern without sticking a yellow card in among them. Everything suggests that no, you can't, and in fact it seems tough to stick anyone with penalty points if they can avail themselves of such an out, but it's one of those things you really wish the designer would have made note of in no uncertain terms. Otherwise the instructions seem flawless and learning the game takes only a few seconds.

At first you'll wonder how it's possible to lock yourself out of playing, but eventually your avenues of play begin disappearing. Before long you have to double-check your plays to make sure you haven't done anything wrong. Deliberately interfering with your opponents' strategies doesn't seem possible, though you end up playing in a lot of the same spaces anyway. The penalties don't come until closer to the game's end, but it seems unlikely you can avoid any consequences. The yellow cards make it easier to place blues so you hang onto them, but at the same time that delay may mean you're stuck with them during scoring.

If you like the one you play in the morning paper, you'll probably find **Sudoku: The Card Game** an entertaining activity. Even before the endgame you're agonizing about how and where to play, and it feels pretty similar if not as exasperating. If you're not a fan, eh . . . less so. A long delay before penalty points accrue (and few of them assigned even then) and an inability to turn the fascinating number play into a real strategy makes Sudoku feels even more like your morning paper. The outcome has been decided, and how long it takes you to get there is the only element you can really affect.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Ken Hite's Dubious Shards

Produced by [Ronin Arts](#)

Written & Illustrated by Kenneth Hite

108-Page Perfect Bound Black & White Book; $11.95
78-Page 6.3 Mb Black & White PDF; $11.95

Something old, something new, none of it blue. Most of it green. As in Great Cthulhu and *[Delta Green](#)*. Which is what you get with *Dubious Shards,* an anthology of writings from the pen of Mr. Kenneth Hite, self-styled heresiarch,* and author of such erudite tomes as *[Nightmares of Mine](#), Suppressed Transmission, GURPS Horror,* and *GURPS Cabal.* And all of the entries in this volume are for his favorite game, *[Call of Cthulhu](#)*, and its inspiration, H.P. Lovecraft.

* His Cult being the only one that would I happily pay the membership fees for -- now where do I apply?

A slim volume, *Dubious Shards* is divided into three sections: Lore, "The Winslow Project," and Criticism. The first and third sections are comprised of several short essays, while the second, "The Winslow Project," is a scenario originally intended for Pagan Publishing's *Delta Green.* Only three items are wholly original to this volume, these being "The 'How' Of Hastur: Ruminations on Applied Yog-Sothothery," the scenario, and "The Man Who Shot Joseph Curwen." The rest originates either here on *Pyramid* or upon the author's Live Journal.

The Lore section opens with "The 'How' Of Hastur: Ruminations on Applied Yog-Sothothery," a discussion of how to detect the Mythos. Or rather, how to work it into something -- in this instance, a roleplaying scenario -- and make it detectable to others. At its most simple, this involves making connections between disparate pieces of information, recognizing patterns not readily apparent, and drawing from the myth sources that you know and interpreting them through the Mythos. Throughout Hite shows us how Lovecraft did it in his fiction, but the reader is left wanting to see how Kenneth Hite would do it.

And then Mr. Hite shows us. Five Essays follow, all recognizable to the *Pyramid* reader as Lovecraftian-themed Suppressed Transmissions all. "[The Trail of Dagon](#)" explores the origins and reach of the piscine deity, while "[Irem, The City of Pillars](#)" does the same for the Arabian Peninsula's lost city. Lovecraft's own fascination with New England's vampire legends comes to the fore in "[Vampish Vapours in the Shunned House](#)" as we are taken "[Down to Dunwich](#)" in an excursion to Lovecraft Country's English counterpart. Finally, the inspiration for this volume comes under the same viewing glass in "[The Shadow Out of Lovecraft](#)." This last essay does not quite work, but then again it does. Its problem is that as fascinating as we find Lovecraft's life, he was still very ordinary, so in making the connections, Hite is almost overreaching himself in making too much of Lovecraft's life and pushing at the limits of his pattern recognition.

Of the other quartet, "The Trail of Dagon" breathes new life into the now non-fishy god, suggesting how a GM (in another conspiratorial game) or a Keeper could take him away from the shore, while "Irem, The City of Pillars" is an example of the process without easy application. Although a good read, how and where you would use it is not something it readily suggests. "Vampish Vapours in the Shunned House" brings together consumption, vampirism, and men of letters in a fascinating read just as "Down to Dunwich" explores the fascination held by various poets with the washed away medieval port on the Suffolk coast. Besides its history, it also ties the town into several legends of undersea cities, the overall effect making it particularly suited to a *Gloriana*-era RPG. It should be made clear though, that none of these essays have been annotated, something that we can wait for.

At 30 pages, "The Winslow Project" is the longest piece in the book. Originally intended for use in the still-unpublished *Cult of Transcendence* supplement for *Delta Green,* the author has unshackled the scenario from its original use to make it suited to a contemporary *Call of Cthulhu* campaign. Except in being almost a decade old, it shows its age. Or rather, our world has overtaken it, as the idea of being under near constant surveillance is less of a shock than it would have been in 1998. "The Winslow Project" focuses upon a town that is a perfect microcosm of the USA, intentionally so, since it has been used a test bed for decades to determine the reaction of America at large to "innovations" such as ATMs and "voluntary" drug tests. What draws the investigators to Winslow is the coincidence of four odd deaths tied to the town. The same four deaths are reason enough for the Project's masters, their exact identity being left up to the Keeper (although suggestions are certainly given), to close the Project down leaving no traces.

The focus of the scenario is not fighting the Mythos; indeed, the Mythos makes almost no appearance here. Instead, the investigators must find out what is going while under near constant surveillance and -- if the characters are Federal Agents -- up against helpful obstruction. "The Winslow Project" is suited to beginning characters as well as *Delta Green* agents or friendly associates, and as the jumping off point into a much larger conspiracy. The scenario's small scale and its conspiracy with a small "c" also makes it suited for use with other conspiratorial RPGs. Overall, "The Winslow Project" is a good *Call of Cthulhu* scenario, an even better *Delta Green* scenario, and pointedly obvious that Ken Hite should be being paid to write more *Call of Cthulhu* material.

The last section, "Criticism," contains only two pieces. The first is "The Shadow From The Right," a review of *H.P. Lovecraft: Against the World, Against Life* by Michel Houellebecq. Essentially, this is counter argument and a refutation of the French author's thesis that Lovecraft's writings were driven by his racism, xenophobia, and reactionary leanings. Despite not having read the book in question, this is still a fascinating read and a convincing argument.

Finally, the aptly named "The Man Who Shot Joseph Curwen" takes us out West to face the Mythos, though not to wear a white hat and gun down the black hat. No, Hite's core tenet is that *Call of Cthulhu* is the only RPG with a moral drive (that is, until the appearance of D Vincent Baker's *Dogs in the Vineyard,* itself a Western-set RPG). Just as the white hat gunfighter is forced to take up the gun to deal with the black hat outlaw to protect society and in doing alienates himself from society, so the investigator is forced to use the Mythos to stall the greater Mythos, and thus make themselves outcasts. In some ways, this is the most accessible of the anthology's essays, and really defines the role of the *Call of Cthulhu* investigator.

Published by Phil Reed's Ronin Arts, *Dubious Shards* was originally released as a book at Origins 2006 in a limited run, but is now only available in PDF format. The book is simply laid out, the only illustrations being those drawn by the author himself. This is his "Tarot of Cthulhu" (not the first Lovecraftian themed tarot though), a scratchy set of pen and ink drawings that surprisingly hints at the cosmic nihilism of the source. They are really not bad, but in suggesting that Mr. Hite not give up his day job, my intention is that he keep writing rather than drawing.

Enjoyable, thoughtful, and thought provoking, *Dubious Shards* is also an odd book in that it beings together degrees of Lovecraftian scholarship and Lovecraftian gaming in one volume. This may mean that there is not enough of either to completely attract either audience, though I suspect that *Dubious Shards* will appeal more to the Lovecraftian gamer, and then the Hitean scholar even more. This, at least, suggests an explanation of the anthology's title. Throughout Ken Hite's *Dubious Shards,* though, what shows is the regard with which he holds both game and author, and that regard deserves more space.

--Matthew Pook

Contrivance and Contrivability

In a way, your average RPG campaigns are lucky; they don't aspire to be great works of art. This isn't to say they *can't* rise to such ideals, but hate normal expectations of artistry -- even "bad" artistry -- don't apply. Thus players (and GMs) are much more accepting of elements and contrivances that, in most other forms of media, would elicit something between an eyebrow raise and outright guffaws of disbelief.

I thought bout this aspect on Tuesday night and Wednesday morning as the election results for our country started rolling in. Over in Mark Evanier's [blog](#) (which I've cited from time to time, and who has direct bearing on this column because he was the developer and one of the writers for the *Dungeons & Dragons* cartoon), he points out that -- if you were writing a political-type drama such as *The West Wing* -- you couldn't make up the nail-biting cliffhanger unfolding as happened, since audiences wouldn't believe it: "Oh, c'mon; you mean, one party needs to win three out of three Senate races to gain control of the entirety of Congress, and all three are too close to call, with differentials of a few thousand votes apiece?! Yeah, right . . ." (I was overcome with a similar feeling of dramatic unbelievability in 2000, when the ping-ponging election resulted in a handful of votes making the difference in my then-home of Florida, ultimately boiling down to a week-long drama unfolding in my city. I kept expecting a Carl Barks-esque revelation along the lines of, "According to a previously little-known law, a super-vote worth 1,000 votes is granted to the resident who owns the longest piece of string . . .")

Fortunately, the real world isn't constrained by the requirements of believable drama. And neither are RPGs. Your standard gaming campaign is filled with clichés and implausibilities that would make anyone with a literary bent roll his eyes. The hopes of the world hinge on finding the Amulet of Wernda, on discovering the antidote with 24 hours, on recovering the Fifth Element. (Boron?)

In what may be the ultimate irony, the reason RPGs are contrived is the same reason more literary fare isn't: the actions of characters (or PCs) are the most important thing. In non-contrived creations, the actions of the protagonists are presumed to be somewhat obvious; when the daughter of the main agent character in a movie happens to be suspected of going rogue with the nation's secrets, then it's a yawner to the audience when the agent himself goes rogue in an effort to track her down. But in an RPG, the actions of the players are *never* obvious. Sure, the GM might have a good idea as to what the folks on the other side of the duck blind are going to do, but he never knows for sure.

In fact, there's one ability the players have that the protagonists in other media hardly ever have: the option of saying, "No." Think about it: You go to the movies, sit down to see Gilly Terrium's new film *XII,* and the first 15 minutes detail the premise about how a dozen monks are going to be infected with an apocalyptic virus and released into the streets of New York City. And the heroes, listening to this tale, go, "Hmm . . . well, I think we're going to hide in New Jersey until this boils over."

Or, "Hmm . . . what's in it for us? Can we negotiate that reward higher?"

Or, "Hmm . . . I think we'll try to capture one of the monks and keep him in reserve for the future. Just in case."

In this hypothetical movie, it's entirely likely that anything the heroes end up doing will wind up having a certain "been there, done that" feeling to it. In the RPG version of this scenario, though, it's entirely likely that many actions the heroes attempt will feel fresh, either in the actions or the results. GMs and players aren't constrained by the need to wrap up tidily in two hours, or to tie up any loose ends, or definitively conclude storylines, or even make *sense.* (I've had more than one storyline where, in discussing the events with the players a few months later, none of us were exactly clear on what had happened.) In our "rogue daughter" scenario, maybe the heroes will go rogue themselves, or maybe they'll try to enlist the aid of their agency, or maybe they'll concoct a plot with the higher-ups with the organization to make it *seem* that they've gone rogue, but only in an effort to lure out the gal.

In many gaming groups (certainly most of the ones I've been in), contrived situations provide an ideal situation for acting against expectations. In a lot of ways, they provide an outlet for our movie-watching, book-reading selves to act in ways that their counterparts in fiction cannot: "Now look . . . there's a zombie horde attacking the city. Why doesn't

anyone try to capture one for research instead of fighting them ineffectively one at a time?" Well, nothing except GM fiat keeps them from trying in an RPG.

Remember: There's hardly any sense in trying to be [utterly original](#), and even the most contrived situation must have been a fresh innovation at some point (although, admittedly, this might around the same time that the Dead Sea Scrolls were still alive). But the reactions and interactions of characters -- like those provided by the players and GM -- can still provide a world of interesting situations and outcomes.

Even if it's an hour until the galactic senate is about to appoint the sinister Eve Ill to the post of Empress unless the 13 missing senators are returned . . .

--Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

Frazer's World

for *GURPS*

by Terry Carlino

In 1890 the greatest theoretical theurgist of the modern era, Sir James George Frazer, published his breakthrough description of sympathetic magic, The Golden Bough. Like his 20th century pupil Albert Einstein, Frazer possessed not a whit of the genetic makeup that would let an adept use the power of the universal mana to directly manipulate the laws of magic. His contribution was to codify the first two laws of magic. The direct result of Frazer's work was the advancement of magic from a poorer cousin of the burgeoning sciences to the preeminent roll in man's mastery of physical world, and his march into the modern age.

The principles of magic can best be described as embodied in the Law of Similarity and the Law of Contagion. These are systematized versions of the manipulations of symbols to cause effects in the physical world.

Basically, the Law of Similarity says that like produces like. So if a magician wishes to make it rain he can create a model of a location and use a sprinkling can of water to create an effect similar to rain and it will rain in that location. Except, of course, it won't.

That is where the Law of Contagion comes in. This law says that things which have once been in contact will continue to act, one on the other, after physical contact has been severed. So our magician, to achieve the effect he desired, must fill his watering can with rainwater -- that is, water collected directly from a rainstorm. Then he can cause a storm, limited to the time he can continue to pour the rainwater on his model.

Of course, Frazer did not merely state these laws; he mathematically inferred them, using the sigil representations he developed, most scholars agree, based on work he did while in Greece.

Any adept with a hope of being able to do magic must master at least a working knowledge of the laws of magic. Anyone hoping to create new magic techniques or devices must have a deep mastery of theoretical magic.

History

The introduction of magic into a world already mastering the physical sciences had a profound effect. Frazer's work was quickly verified by scientists and students of the occult throughout the western world.

The existence of magic had a great effect on the dominance of the wider world by western civilization. Already technologically inferior, the fairly ineffective hedge magic of the indigenous peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa and the Asian continent allowed strategic dominance by Western Europe and the Americas.

Advances in the United States in the mass production of enchanted articles was quickly copied in Europe, especially in Britain and the German Empire. This resulted in a magical arms race. Many times during the next decades the nations of Europe almost went to war.

However, the presence of magic as often prevented war as pushed the nations of Europe closer to it, as is attested by the attempted assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria. Only the presence of his wife, Sophie, Herzogin von Hohenberg, a master magician, prevented a sure death and most surely a bloody war. The rapid discourse allowed via enchanted communication devices allowed war to be averted. Another side effect of Archduchess Sophia's actions was annulment of her morganatic marriage by the Vatican to allow a dynastic marriage, which resulted in the eventual ascension of their son Archduke Maximilian to the throne of Austria-Hungary-Croatia.

The peace was finally broken in 1933 when the National-Socialist German Workers Party seized power in German in response to Pius XI's 1932 encyclical *Ob Magicum.* The Vatican's acceptance of magic has been attributed to the progressive Jesuit Superior General Wlodimir Ledochowski, who had close ties to the Austrian aristocracy, as well as a strong strain of magery in his family. His sister was Saint Ursula Julia Ledchowska, foundress of the Congregation of Ursuline Magus Sisters of Agonizing Heart of Jesus, an order of magician clerics.

The Nazi attempts to seize power in the Triune Monarchy was initially taken through Englebert Dolfuss, who attempted to insinuate himself into the government of King Maximillian. Dolfuss was assassinated by elements of the Austrian Secret Police based on information obtained from Serbian nationalists.

The failure of the National-Socialist Party to seize power in Austria-Hungary-Croatia did not prevent them from persecuting adepts in Germany. The so called "religious wars" resulted in the establishment of concentration camps where mages and Jews were sent. Especially persecuted were clerical magicians, who were seen by the Nazi party as especially dangerous to the Government's ability to control information and as being unreliable, due to their connection to the Vatican.

The World War broke out when the Nazi German government moved overtly against the Triune Monarchy of Austria-Hungary-Croatia in 1938. The Germans were repelled by the might of The Magic Defenders of The Kingdoms and Lands Represented in the Imperial Council and the Lands of the Crown of St. Stephen. Germany quickly harnessed the talents of its captive magical population, turning its concentration camps into work camps where hapless mid-level mages were guarded by demons bound to the service of the Reich.

British support of the German move, based primarily on support of King George V of the suppression of both Catholics and adepts, extended the conflict into a wider war. France came to the support of the Triune Monarchy, as did Italy. The Russian Empire, which coveted lands along the Hungarian-Ukraine border, and which had long repressed its non-clerical adepts, entered on the German side in 1940.

The United States, at first a neutral provider of enchantments to both sides, joined on the side of the Triune Empire after the discovery of the famous Zimmermann dispatch, an encoded message being carried by a familiar to the German Ambassador in Canada, instructing her to propose an alliance with English Canada promising financial assistance in restoration of its former territories in Quebec and additional territory in New York and Michigan. The message itself was intercepted by Austrian agents and quickly passed to the Quebec and American governments.

With combat taking place on every continent, from the North American Great Lakes to the Indian subcontinent, the casualties among both the mundane and the adept were horrendous. Under the encouragement of his former student, the Hungarian-American master magician Le Szilrd, Albert Einstein sent his famous letter to President Joseph P. Kennedy urging the study of the advanced planar/apportation spell, under fears that the Nazi government would be the first to develop the ability to apportate hellfire from another plane. The development of these basic elemental weapons became the massive Oak Ridge project carried on in the research laboratory on Manhattan's Randall Island.

The United States use of this spell against the German city of Dresden and the Russian city of Volgograd in 1947 ended the war, but at horrific loss of life. Britain was able to make a separate peace in 1946, though it lost a good part of its western Canadian lands to the United States and of its eastern Canadian lands to Quebec. With the loss of India to American OSS (Office of Special Sorceries) backed rebels and its African territories (picked up in the early 1900s from the decaying Ottoman Empire) to the Vatican backed Italians, the British Empire effectively came to an end.

Frazer's World now sets in an uneasy period of reconstruction. The 1950s see Germany split between the American occupation force in the east and the French occupation force in the west. Italy is generally unhappy with this state of affairs, as the French government is not especially friendly to the Vatican. The 1956 election of Joseph P. Kennedy Junior, a decorated war veteran, master magician, and Catholic, speaks well for continuing good relations between the Italian Papal States and the United States. Russia was much too big for the Triune Empire to swallow, and -- though unhappy with the American forces arrayed on their border -- console themselves with the Slavic lands of Ukraine and Bellorussia. A shaky Russian Monarchy still holds its trained adapts in special villages and ghettos, while pressuring the Church to limit its number of magicians.

Personalities

The following individuals other than Frazer were key individuals in the development of the modern magical world.

Thomas Alva Edison

Edison started out working in the mundane sciences. He was one of the first to apply the principles of mass production to magical as well as mundane research, though he himself was only a mediocre magician.

His first mundane patent, the electric voice recorder, was granted in 1868. In 1876 he set up his Menlo Park Laboratory. In 1883 he hired Frank J. Sprague, an accomplished mathematician and engineer. In 1884 Nikola Tesla also came to Edison's New Jersey plant. Though both men only did mundane research for Edison during this period, which was prior to the publication of Frazer's research, both were later to make significant contributions to the study of Theurgy. Both left Edison's employ prior to 1890.

Edison prevailed on Frank J. Sprague to rejoin his organization in 1891 to investigate the new magical phenomenon detailed in Frazer's papers. Eventually Edison was award no less than 47 magical patents, truly the "Wizard of Menlo Park."

In 1891 Tesla also established his 35 South Fifth Avenue laboratory to investigate Sympathetic Magic. His work in this area was always groundbreaking, though in his later years Tesla became known as a Dark Magician. Though Tesla's official record ascribes his date of death as January 1943 there have been rumors for decades that he was still alive. What is known is that after his reported death the Federal Bureau of Investigation instructed the Office of Magical Affairs to take possession of his papers and property from his rooms at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City. The present location of these articles is unknown, though they might be in one of the Smithsonian Institution's private storerooms.

Albert Einstein

In 1891, Albert Einstein taught himself Euclidean plane geometry and calculus at the age of 16. In 1894 he began studying Frazer's work, and in 1895 performed his famous thought experiment known as Einstein's mirror, which became the bridging postulate on the interaction of the Laws of Similarity and Contagion which he would later be formalized in special relativity.

In 1900 Einstein wrote his first paper titled *Folgerungen aus den hnlichkeittserscheinungen* ("Consequences of the observations of similarity phenomena").

Einstein's lack of any magical ability prevented him from finding a teaching post, despite his grasp of theoretical magic. The father of a classmate helped him obtain a employment at the Swiss Patent Office in 1902, where he served as a technical assistant examiner for magical inventions. (See the section on magical patents.)

In 1903 Einstein married Meleve Maric, who was both a talented theurgist and an accomplished master magician.

He obtained his doctorate in 1905 with *Eine neue Ermittlung der Ansteckung* ("A new determination of Contagion"). That same year he wrote several papers, one of which was on special relativity (that is, on the interaction of the Laws of Similarity and Contagion).

Most interestingly enough, though Einstein is better known for his work on relativity, it was his work in apportation that garnered him the Nobel Prize.

In 1915 Einstein presented his explanation on his theory of magical binding, known as general relativity.

The religious wars in German in the 1930s caused Einstein to emigrate to the United States, where he was teaching as

a guest professor at Princeton University. He accepted a position at the Institute for Advanced Magical Study in Princeton Township.

Einstein spent his time working on a unified field theory, whose purpose was to unify the laws of magic with the laws of physics. This was a universal mathematical approach to reducing the different phenomena to a coherent whole. He was ultimately unsuccessful in his attempts. He died in 1955 leaving the Generalized Theory of Fundamental Forces unsolved, or at least unpublished.

Henry Ford

Ford first worked with Edison in the perfection of magical devices. In 1903 he raised $28,000 in capital and started the Ford Enchantment Company. He perfected the process by which mages of poor to mediocre talents could produce devices with multiple enchantments via the use of the assembly line. This allow device which up to this time had to be produced by time intensive labor of master magicians to be mass produced.

The World

Magical Patents

Magical patents are granted on the basis of enchantments of magical objects. The most common of magical elements, binding compound, was made unpatentable, at least in the United States, by the Magical Properties Act of 1922. In order to secure a patent it must be proved that the enchanted item was produced using a magical method which could be followed by a person skilled in the art to make and use the item and which is not already either patented or in the public domain. In some countries, like the United States, it must also be novel, non-obvious, and useful, most notably for industrial application.

Mana

Frazer's World is a high mana world. For game purposes fully 2/3 of the population can be considered to have Magery at some level. Most have Magery 0. Anyone working as a magician should have at least Magery 2. A Master Magician will have at least Magery 4 as well as a new skill, theurgy, the Sympathetic Magic version of Thaumatology.

Theurgy *(IQ/Very Hard)*
Default IQ-6 Mathematics-4

This is the academic study of Sympathetic Magic. Anyone can learn this skill, and it is not easier for mages. Anyone can learn the elements of common spells, but unless they possess a high level of Theurgy they will be unable to create new spells. Theurgy is a highly mathematical skill, akin to quantum physics or nuclear engineering.

In the modern western world the study and use of magic is regulated. Testing of magical ability is routinely done while a child is still in elementary school. By high school it is quite common for programs to divide adepts of mediocre talents and mundanes from those destined to pursue more advanced study. A number of trade schools and vocational programs prepare low-level mages for work in the many enchantment factories which turn out the magical products that drive the U.S. and European economies. While many mundanes and less-interested adepts go on to study the mundane arts and sciences, it is a rare mundane who get a slot in the programs of the well-known programs of the top Theurgy Universities like MIT and William & Mary.

A PhD in Theurgy is not a prerequisite for a master magician's certification, but one would have to be very talented indeed to succeed in passing the Inquiry without one. In the United States every state but Virginia and South Columbia requires that an aspirant for a master magician's certification have a doctorate from a recognized university program. In those states a journeyman is still allowed to apprentice to an individual master for a proscribed time before facing the Inquiry, in lieu of university education.

A journeyman's license is all that is required to practice common magic and is easily obtained through any number of trade schools or the Magic Practitioners Union.

Most clerical magicians are certified through the church and their ability to practice is recognized by most governments under the Treaty of Montreal.

The Magician's Toolbox

Sympathetic magic requires that the practitioner use a number of otherwise mundane objects to achieve a magical effect. In this it is very like ritual magic. To cast a spell a sympathetic magician typically uses a combination of a wand or other focusing device, an incantation (either verbal or mental), and a number of mundane objects which fulfill the requirements of the Laws of Similarity and Contagion. These mundane objects are divided into two types. The elements are the object which fulfill the requirements of the Laws of Similarity and Contagion. For example, to prove that a bullet has been fired from a specific firearm the practitioner would need the bullet and the gun. This kind of spell is the most basic example of the Law of Contagion and simply requires the firearm be solidly held, as in a vice, and the bullet be able to return to the gun, and that the adept use a wand to focus the mana and a word to control it.

A more complicated spell -- such as one which would sever the contact between the bullet and the gun -- would require that the mage use a sharp knife, preferably of silver, to symbolically cut the connection. The knife is not itself a magical item, though it will work better if it is not also used for mundane tasks.

Professional magicians will always make their own tools. The task of creating the mundane object is relevant to its use in the magic. A magician could attempt to perform the spell of dissociation with a dull kitchen knife, but the spell might not work. It almost certainly would be detectable by a another magician.

A common magician's tool kit would contain the following items:

- Brazer, a vessel in which to create small fires or burn things.
- A sharp silver knife, typically used to perform spells of dissociation.
- A dull iron knife, capable of creating a jagged cut, primarily used in spells of similarity.
- A magnifying glass. Through the Law of Similarity capable of detecting magic and mana charged objects. Using the Law of Contagion capable of capturing light or heat from the sun or other source like a fire.
- Two small squares of silk. Edged with silk thread. One of white. One of black.
- A large blanket of plant fiber, typically flax or cotton. Un-dyed.
- Set of silver tongs, three sizes.
- Wooden dowels
- Length of hemp line. Used to bind.
- Chalk.
- Prism.
- Binding compound.

Magic

Common Spells

Common spells are the most basic ones, and are likely to be known by all mages. More powerful spells require higher levels. Mages cast spells at base skill, provided they have the correct elements. If they lack the elements they can not cast at all. If they must use elements which have been previously put to mundane use, rather than their own tools, they are at a -3 penalty. High skill increases the chance of success of a spell, but still requires the proper elements. Sympathetic magic has some of the aspects of Ritual Magic. Magic is not divided into colleges, and on Frazer's World other kinds of magic do not exist. Clerical magicians in this case do not refer to practitioners of religious ritual magic; it merely refers to members of the church, especially the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches who study

Sympathetic Magic. Both churches have both individuals and orders who concentrate on the study of magic. Other churches may have mages, but their formal position in the church is less related to it.

Elements are typically divided into mundane and enchanted. The most common enchanted elements of spells are a wand and binding compound. Most other elements are mundane.

Binding

Binding is the process by which two dissimilar objects, which must have at least one aspect in common are joined such that they will come under the sway of the Law of Similarity. It requires a wand, binding compound, the object to be bound and a sample of the target object. Common aspect can be material (wood for wood, metal to metal), shape (doll or homunculus to human, sphere to planet), function (rope to bind, spell to bind), etc.

Dissociation

This is the process by which object which are joined by the Law of Contagion can be separated. It requires a length of hemp and a sharp silver knife.

Enchantment

Enchantment is the process by which a mundane substance is endowed with mana force. It is the process for creating a magic item. Enchantments are performed using the rules from page 481 of the ***Basic Set,*** except Sympathetic Magic is used instead of Ritual Magic. Many items on Frazer's World are produced using mass production, which means adept factory workers with magery 1 or 2 labor in groups; these groups are fairly large in most modern factories so it's quite possible for a factory of 1,500 workers to produce 15 100 point magical devices in one day. Magic device are not rare. Enchantment requires the same mundane and magical elements required to cast the spell.

Air Spells

Purify air: Requires a vessel of air.

Create air: Requires a vessel of air and a fan.

Body Control Spells

Itch: Requires a homunculus, pepper or other abrasive substance, and something which as been in contact with the subject.

Pain: Requires a homonculus, a sharp object and something which as been in contact with the subject.

Hinder: Requires a homonculus, length of hemp line.

Deathstrike: Requires a homunculus, a sharp or blunt object, and something which as been in extended contact or was once part of the subject. This is a VH spell and will not penetrate a ward.

Fire Spells

Create fire: Requires a prism and a light source, or a magnifying glass and the sun (fire is started as a mundane fire but through Law of Similarity creates a large blaze remotely). Often a brazer is used to contain the fire.

Extinguish fire: Requires a stick or other flammable material and a vial of water.

Cold: Requires an ice cube or other small cold object.

Gate Spells

Planar summons: Requires something which has been in extended contact with the being to be summoned. The entity can appear bound using the proper binding spell.

Plane shift: Requires an object from the destination plane and a wand. This is a VH spell.

Healing Spells

Lend vitality: Requires a hemp rope, a knife (preferably silver) and a source, usually another living being (or the caster)

Healing: Requires a wand, binding compound and a source, usually another living being or the caster.

Knowledge Spells

Detect magic: Requires a magnifying glass.

Aura: Requires a magnifying glass and prism.

Seeking Spells

Locate object: One of the most basic of spells. Requires a needle, (typically in a compass frame, but not magnetized) and a piece of the object to be located.

Advanced locate object: Requires a needle as above, binding compound, a wand, and an object of the same nature as the one to be located.

Identify Spells

These require a magnifying glass and a prism.

Light and Darkness Spells

Light: Requires a wand and a mirror.

Continual light: Requires a wand, a mirror, and a prism.

Darkness: Requires a dark cloth and a prism.

Blur: Requires a lens and a white cloth.

Meta Spells

Counterspell:: Requires binding compound, a wand, a mirror and the elements of the spell your are tying to counter.

Dispel magic: Requires a wand and a metal dowel. The rod is sank into the ground. Can also use an existing metal object like a pipe or building frame with the usual penalties for use of a mundane object.

Movement Spells

Apportation: Requires a feather, a piece of the material to be moved or a similar material, a wand, and binding compound.

Lockmaster: Requires a key, binding compound, and a wand.

Banish: Requires an element of the home dimension or plane of the creature that the adept is trying to banish.

Protection and Warning Spells

Wards: Requires a way to circumscribe an exclusion area. Chalk or even a rope or line can be used. For protection against mundane threats a simple circle or arc will suffice. A power sigil, such as a pentagram, is required to protect against mystical beings or forces.

Bind: Requires the same elements as wards, but holds something in instead of keeping it out.

The creation of binding compound is an advanced type of magic requiring mastery of Enchantment. It is almost always created in factories and purchased for use by magicians at Magery Shops. Strictly speaking binding compound is not used up in performing magic, but under most circumstances it is not economical to recover. Factories, though have systems to recover and reuse binding powder, typically only replacing a small amount to make up for the inevitable losses during magic production.

Water Spells

Seek Water: Same as a locate spell using water as its element.

Purify water: Requires a vial of pure water.

Creating Spells

For a master magician the creation of new spells can be a long and dangerous endeavor. New spells are created using the technology invention rules from Chapter 17 of the ***Basic Set.*** The GM can create a new spell by using the Laws of Similarity and Contagion -- that is, by imaginatively tying together things which have similarities and constructing ways in which they come in contact, either metaphorically or physically.

Where Does Infinity fit In?

Magical worlds always leave Infinity uncomfortable. Magical worlds with Nazis even more so. The Penetration Service did not arrive on Frazer's World until 1952. There is no doubt that some of the Nazi war criminals escaped capture by the Triune Alliance, but did they escape to South America or to some other alternate, with perhaps outworld help?

As a Q4 world it is not easily accessible to Centrum. The world's odd, non-standard magic has confounded both Infinity's ISWAT mages and several Cabal members, who've found themselves stranded. The world's high mana levels resist efforts to tap it using conventional or even common ritual magic. Whether psionic worldjumpers could leave Frazer's World is still an unanswered question.

Infinity has only been operating on the alternate for five years. They have not opened it up to commercial exploitation; the locally made enchanted devices will not work on other alternates anyway. The U.S. tapping of energies from beyond this world makes UNIC nervous, but all transdimensional apportation research is classified. Both the French and the Triune Monarchy are trying to duplicate the research or steal it. Infinity is not anxious to jump in the middle of that spy game.

Outworld Operations

Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman!

ISWAT would like to get a look at advanced apportation research, to see if it has application for crosstime travel. The risk has been too great, but recently they've found a physicist on another line who is an alternate of one of the mundane theurgists working on a new version of the *weapon* spell, Richard Feynman. Feynman accidentally discovered the Secret and has been co-opted by ISWAT rather than sent to Covenrty. The agents find Feynman brilliant, but undisciplined. Is he brilliant enough to fool the mages on Frazer's World?

The Lost Generation

A scout collecting data in Quebec begins to suspect outworld smuggling when he finds a copy of Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell To Arms* in the science fiction section of a bookstore. He reports to his local contact via drop but then disappears. A week later his body is found in an alley in Buffalo, New York. Time to send in a group of I-Cops!

Almost Reich 7?

Before the discovery of Frazer's World nine out of nine experts would have sworn that the National Socialist German Workers Party could not develop without the crucible of World War I and the onerous terms imposed by the Treaty of Versailles. Frazer's World had neither. The few experts who have been consulted would have bet that the Ottoman Empire would have ended up on the other side of any world war the the Triune Monarchy rather than Germany. But then none of them know about Reich 5.

Local Finds

The FBI's Office of Magical Affairs was folded into the Central Intervention Agency by the National Security Act of 1947. During the reorganization many of Tesla papers were lost, misplaced or stolen. The Agency wants them back. The CIA's mandate does not extend to domestic work, so any agents assigned will have to worry about the FBI, possible foreign agents and maybe a dark magician or two.

The third world has always lagged behind in magical talent. In the post-war world more than a few mercenary magicians have decided to try their luck in Africa, South America, or Asia. Some of the natives have been playing catch-up and are not the hedge magic pushovers they might have once been, making them perfect for a pulp adventure with a little Sympathetic magic added.

Any group of Frazer's World natives might find themselves going against Infinity. Logic would dictate that Sympathetic Magic would not work elsewhere, but Infinity has found that logic often does not come in to play where magic is concerned. Thus a really good master magician might find herself propositioned by ISWAT once he knows too much, or have the chance to find out if Coventry really is mana free.

-9

The Ahaggar Banestorm

by Paul Drye

The French Army knew something wasn't right about that stretch of desert. Men assigned to Fort Laperrine reported bizarre, electrically charged sandstorms and sometimes men disappeared. Of course, men always used to disappear in the Sahara. Hans-Matthias Kchert explored the local petroglyphs on behalf of Heidelberg University in 1863-4, but when Maurice Reygasse explored them in the 1930s many of them didn't match what Kchert had published. The German explorer was posthumously declared a fraud, but some people had doubts.

What little interest there was in the region faded away with the Algerian War and French decolonization. For thirty years it disappeared from the world's attention. An airport and a lonely two-lane road were built, and the oasis around the fort returned to its old name of Tamanrasset while it grew into a small, Tuareg-dominated city.

Then Paul Van Zandt discovered parachronics, and armed with new knowledge some people realized quickly that there really was something not right in the depths of the Sahara. On Homeline, Tamanrasset is no longer just a sleepy town. To the casual eye is hasn't changed very much, but there's a Patrol garrison in town, and it seems to live by the "boredom and terror" rule: most of the time there's nothing going on, but sometimes they go tearing off into the wilderness and it's impossible to find out why.

The Desert Visitors

Tamanrasset is the nearest settlement to Homeline's most active intermittent Banestorm. The Bermuda Triangle may be more famous, but that's only because of the press it gets. Only the utter isolation and inhospitability of the storm's locus, 15 miles east and a bit north of the town on the boundary between the Ahaggar Mountains and the deep sands of the T´ner´ region. Even worse, it's getting more active, apparently in relation to the amount of´parachronic activity now feeding Homeline. Now it's not just a matter of people getting at it, it's about preventing what it spits out from getting at people.

As well as being worried that something dangerous might get out, Infinity also wants to cover up the increasing frequency of the banestorm events. The concern is that, while there's no possible way Homeline will turn its back on parachronics just because it might be weakening spacetime, the events in Algeria could be used as a club against Infinity by their many political enemies. Rather than risk some interest group bringing them to heel, they look to keep a lid on things themselves. To that end, they've manned Tamanrasset's old fort.

Each time the banestorm kicks in, it modifies the landscape in an oval 198 by 94 feet, the center moving a little bit to the southwest each time. The base rock never changes, but sometimes a thin layer of soil or other substance will appear; once it was a three-inch deep slush of ammonia, liquid nitrogen and argon, which evaporated almost immediately. Sometimes the rock art changes. Most of the time it's just artifacts or living creatures that get dropped

off.

Storms come about every 16 days, with the longest gap since 2019 being just over 37 days. The shortest involved a quartet of Andronovo charioteers who were crushed to death by the rotting carcass of a plesiosaur 91 seconds later.

This leads to the next issue: the complete randomness of the banestorm's connections. It's not so much that what it drops off on Homeline is necessarily dangerous -- it usually isn't -- it's that Infinity has no idea what's going to pop out next. Many of the best minds at Paralabs worked on the problem for more than two decades and came up with nothing; whatever physical principles are at play, they look random to Homeline science. Since 2019, Infinity has focused on rolling with the punches, getting to the site first after each event and using military force on anything that might present a problem.

Tamanrasset Town

Modern-day Tamanrasset is the regional capital, with a small core that's pleasant by western standards and a much larger surrounding area that is fairly well-built, but poor. In theory it has a population of 60,000, but this includes about 20,000 Tuareg who wander the countryside in their old, nomadic lifestyle, who have been designated inhabitants by Algiers largely for political reasons.

Seen from the air, the city is egg-shaped, with the point of the egg oriented northwest. The only paved road outside of the town itself approaches from that direction, passing Aguemar airport before entering the city; not much south of town the blacktop ends and the "road" becomes a track through the sands. The nearest other towns of note are more than 10 hours drive away (Aïn Salah to the north, and Niger's Agadez to the south), so visitors usually fly in on Air Algeria from Algiers.

The main portion of the town is low-slung, with almost all buildings being single-storied, constructed from local stone and painted brownish-red in a time-honored manner. Algeria's oil wealth has stretched this far south, so that despite obviously being a town in an underdeveloped country there's good quality electricity and running water.

Both are welcome as the daytime temperature in the summer often exceeds 100°F and rarely goes below 65 even in the depths of winter. At night, though, it's not unusual to lose 20 degrees. As Tamanrasset is at altitude, descending into the desert makes the heat even worse, and of course there is no rain no matter where one goes, except for the occasional drizzle in summer.

Fort and Observatory

The first fort in the region was built in 1916 as Senoussi raiders took advantage of French military weakness during World War I. It was then built up into its present form in the 1930s; the remains of what was called Fort Laperrine were refurbished during the Algerian civil war in the 1990s, and Infinity took them over in 2001. They are in the northeast corner of the town.

The fort is a square oriented at a slight angle to the north, surrounded by an old clay wall; recent chain link fences topped with razor wire run along the outside and inside of the wall. Most of the interior area is open ground for training, with a barracks, a chow hall, and administrative offices at one side, and the garages and maintenance bays for the fort's vehicles on the other. The complement of buildings is rounded out by a large warehouse called the Oubliette in the middle of the base.

There are also two helicopters on pads which can get a total of 14 people (including four pilots) out to the banestorm site in about 10 minutes. The rest of the 80 armed personnel can follow in heavy APCs within an hour.

Tamanrasset has been the site of a geomagnetic observatory since the 1980s; when it was realized that Ahaggar had an intermittent banestorm, Infinity took over the observatory from the Algerian Centre de Recherche AAG. The building is just one room, small and square, ten minutes out of town along a side path that gets it away from the worst of the

electrical interference civilization brings these days. The observatory's instrumentation has been gutted and a parachronic detector installed. The balky machine, dubbed Handsome Dan, is simultaneously loved and loathed by its operators. The first warning of a new banestorm event is almost always from here, either through Dan or the less-glamorous directional radio receiver that picks up the electrical discharges which accompany them.

The Reaction Force

Being sent to Tamanrasset is a sign of official disapproval. This doesn't mean that the agents they get are useless, just that many of them are and the ones who aren't have a knack for annoying the important. They come from all over the world, though the Algerian government has requested that none of them be French -- even 60 years on, the memory of the Algerian War makes French soldiers in Algeria politically impossible. Ironically, this has isolated the fort's personnel, as only a few of them speak more than a bit of the local language.

As mentioned before, almost the whole complement of the fort turns out when the banestorm lights up. This is overkill for almost anything that can come through, but Infinity's general policy is "better safe than sorry." If it's decided that the intrusion is benign, 80 percent of the force returns to base, turning over the investigation to the remainder of them who have specialized training for figuring out what showed up this time: biology, forensics, archeology, and the like. Infinity avoids using civilian experts on these problems, bringing them in only if something completely stumps the people they've got on the scene.

The Oubliette

The variety of junk coming in through the banestorm is so random that, unless someone back in civilization wants to take a look at it, it gets stuck in storage at the fort. The Oubliette is Homeline's little brother to Warehouse 23, with more emphasis on the odd than the dangerous. Some of what they've got includes:

- A thousand-pound dog in full riding tack and saddle. The men call him "Speck" and keep him fed on enormous quantities of kibble and whatever meat is cheap at the town market on any given day.
- A broken hybrid analog-digital computer with the legend *Brasil Imp´rio* embossed on it.
- Several realistic life-sized clay statues dressed in a quasi-medieval manner. Everyone describes as inhuman, even though they've been measured a thousand times and always match up with perfectly normal values for arm length, skull size, and any other parameters people have thought to check.
- A wooden crate of dusty, crumbling scrolls, that apparently tell a distorted version of the Rig Veda in 6th-century Gothic.
- The rusted-out and sandblasted hulk of a 1951 Tucker sedan.

The Desert

North American visitors will find the landscape around the Ahaggar Banestorm eerily familiar -- the Dali-esque rock formations resemble something out of Road Runner cartoons. Those unfamiliar with the Warner Brothers' oeuvre will describe it as reddish stumps and spines of volcanic rock rearing out of the caramel-colored sands. The landscape to the north is extremely broken, which is problematic if something incoming heads in that direction. To the south and east are the stereotypical Saharan landscape of saffron dunes.

The Unwilling Invader

On an as-yet undiscovered timeline -- it will be called Lucifer-7 if a GM's players don't name it themselves -- the meteoroid that caused the Canterbury Event of 1178 missed the rim of the Moon and hit the Earth. Unfortunately for the inhabitants of that Earth, the incoming piece of rubble was carrying the spores of that timeline's most successful alien species: a microscopic, infinitely adaptable, collective intelligence that uses hosts to interact with the large-scale world. Within a few decades the last humans were infected and a stagnant but perpetual peace fell across the planet.

Life continued much as before, absent unnecessary things like art or emotion, as the Canterbury Plague piggy-backed on the agricultural societies of the world while it contemplated the mathematical and physical mysteries which interested it.

When the Banestorm momentarily connected Lucifer-7 and Homeline, nine farmers from what was once Almohad Spain were dropped into the Sahara. While the Tamanrasset garrison brought them into custody quickly, they missed the strange cargo the peasants brought. Fortunately the small portions of the alien presence in their bodies is not specialized to reproduce, and can only infect one new person a month after an initial burst of growth. It has also been busted down to less-than-human intelligence after being cut off from the bulk of its units. Instead of marshalling its forces so it can eventually grow exponentially, the Plague stupidly sends hosts back out into the desert when an opportunity presents itself, looking to contact home and usually dying. It's also very poor at picking hosts, and has so far only infected people near the bottom of the fort's chain of command.

Infinity's plan is to eventually send the farmers to Coventry, and in fact that should have happened by now. However, the Plague has managed to co-opt enough people that they can confuse the issue. For now, the collective is still in hiding on the base. However, while it can access the memories of those it rides, its lack of intelligence means that it's not very good at the jobs it has to handle if it wants to be inconspicuous. So far the fort's commander thinks the growing incompetence of his people is just a regular discipline problem, thanks to boredom from being stuck out in the middle of nowhere . . .

Being infected by the Canterbury Plague is a meta-trait. While on any timeline except Lucifer-7, victims are Hidebound [-5], Incurious [-5], have Low Empathy [-20], Time Sickness (Very Severe, Acute) [-20], and a Slave Mentality [-40], but in return receive Clairsentience (Increased Range ×2, Visible, Only through other Plague-infected -20%) [40] and Dominance (Bite, Only once per month -50%) [10]. The total point cost of this meta-trait is -40 points. In the unlikely event anyone ventures to Lucifer-7 while dealing with Tamanrasset, the millions of other Plague-infected remove the Hidebound and Incurious disadvantages and gain the Eidetic Memory and Enhanced Time Sense (1) advantages, turning the meta-trait into an advantage worth of 20 points.

Characters

Colonel Quentin Vermaak: A colonel in the South African army, seconded to Infinity, he has been a controversial choice as the fort's commander after being selected last year. The Algerian government had informally requested an African, and they didn't mean a Boer -- the three-decade old end of apartheid notwithstanding.

Worse, Vermaak is here for the same reason so many others are: his superiors were glad to get rid of him. He's a fussy, bureaucratic, rules-mad nightmare, slowly going crazy in this isolated post where discipline slides. His role is to apply these values to the players and make them as nutty as he is with his constant demands.

He is 38 years old, clean-shaven and with blond hair in a buzz cut. He dresses immaculately, which is quite an accomplishment in Tamanrasset.

Quentin Vermaak   *150 points*

Human; 5'10"; 180lbs.

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 6 [5]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 10; Parry 10 (Brawling).

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].

CF: Western (Native) [0].
Languages: Afrikaans (Native) [0]; English (Accented) [4]; French (Broken) [2].

Advantages

Combat Reflexes [15]; Fit [5]; Military Rank 3 [15].

Disadvantages

Bad Temper (12 or less) [-10]; Duty (Military) (15 or less (almost always)) [-15]; Hidebound [-5]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; Overconfidence (12 or less) [-5].
Quirks: Constantly exhorts people to do things "By the Book"; Neat freak; Proud [-3].

Skills

Administration-15 (IQ+3) [12]; Brawling-12 (DX+0) [1]; Computer Operation/TL8-12 (IQ+0) [1]; Driving/TL8 (Heavy Wheeled)-12 (DX+0) [2]; Explosives/TL8 (Demolition)-12 (IQ+0) [2]; First Aid/TL8 (Human)-12 (IQ+0) [1]; Guns/TL8 (Submachine Gun)-14 (DX+2) [4]; Law (Military)-11 (IQ-1) [2]; Leadership-13 (IQ+1) [4]; Savoir-Faire (Military)-13 (IQ+1) [2]; Scrounging-12 (Per+0) [1]; Soldier/TL8-14 (IQ+2) [8]; Survival (Desert)-13 (Per+1) [4]; Tactics-13 (IQ+1) [8].

Mezwar bin Amouzeg: The mayor of Tamanrasset, he is of two minds about Infinity's presence. For one, he's not party to the reason for them being here. That annoys him on a personal level, and he worries about what the danger must be for the outside world to intrude like this. On the other hand, he's noticed that the government in Algiers pays more attention to Tamanrasset when Infinity is involved, and it's easier to get things done as a result. He suspects, rightly, that the government is in on the secret, and that their helpfulness will evaporate if Infinity's operation is shut down.

Mezwar is a 56-year old Tuareg man, hatchet-faced with dark skin and eyes. He actually looks something like Bob Marley, but people won't notice this unless they meet him inside; like other adult Tuareg men he wears a dark blue veil slung from his turban when out and about.

Though a Muslim, and culturally conservative, he's more inclined towards the old-style syncretic Islam of the Tuareg and is more forgiving of idiosyncrasy than most other people with his background. His inclination to bend extends to typical Algerian government corruption, and he casually accepts bribes even if he isn't on the take to any serious extent.

Like many rural Algerians, he was caught up in the Islamic Salvation Front's rebellion in the 1990s. While the fighting never extended as far south as Tamanrasset, he did learn how to shoot and ride in case the rebels came calling. Those skills had been fading among the Tuareg for some time, but came back in the face of the new threat and still haven't disappeared again.

Mezwar bin Amouzeg   *125 points*

Human; 5'9"; 160lbs.

ST 12 [20]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 13 [2]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 0.

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].
CF: Arabic (Native) [0].
Languages: Arabic (Native/) [0]; French (Accented) [4]; Tamasheq (Accented) [4].

Advantages

Charisma 1 [5]; Common Sense [10]; Legal Immunity 1 [5]; Status 1 [5]; Voice [10].

Disadvantages

Addiction (Tobacco) (Cheap) (Highly addictive; Legal) [-5]; Duty (Mayor of Tamanrasset) (15 or less (almost always)) [-15]; Paranoia [-10]; Selfish (12 or less) [-5]; Sense of Duty (Tribe) (Small Group) [-5].
Quirks: Alcohol Intolerance; Always wears a veil and turban outside [-2].

Skills

Administration-13 (IQ+0) [2]; Area Knowledge (Ahaggar Mountains)-13 (IQ+0) [1]; Body Language (Human)-12 (Per-1) [1]; Diplomacy-16 (IQ+3) [8]; Guns/TL8 (Rifle)-11 (DX+1) [2]; Law (Algerian)-13 (IQ+0) [4]; Leadership-16 (IQ+3) [8]; Politics-14 (IQ+1) [1]; Public Speaking (Debate)-16 (IQ+3) [1]; Public Speaking (Oratory)-16 (IQ+3) [1]; Riding (Camel)-9 (DX-1) [1]; Survival (Desert)-13 (Per+0) [2].

Adventure Seeds

The desert banestorm is a convenient plot device that excuses virtually any odd thought a GM has ever had, but to get started consider:

Hill People Are Trouble: A pack of neo-troodons are dropped in the desert, and unlike most other visitors they're hunter-gatherers actually familiar with living in that kind of environment. If anything, this part of the Sahara is nicer than their usual stomping grounds in Central Australia. They regroup very quickly and high-tail it for the broken mountains, where they'll put on a virtuoso performance of stone-spear violence if any humans catch up. On the other hand, the local Tuareg aren't pushovers either. Depending on how Infinity's pursuers handle things, the secret of what's going on in the desert might be blown.

No Return Address: A Paralabs attempt to sever the banestorm's connection to Homeline instead throws the group (and, for fun, a considerable number of locals) into who-knows-what timeline. It's unclear where they are, or how to even phone home for a ride.

What to Get For the Man Who Has Everything: A past patron of the agents, one still on good terms with them, has learned that a mummified unicorn (or a lascivious piece of rock art, or part of Amelia Earhart's plane, or any other object that dovetails with the patron's previous interests) has been stashed in the Oubliette. While his old friends might not have the authority to take the McGuffin, the patron persuades them to go to Algeria and try -- either out of the goodness of their hearts, or for a quid pro quo.

I Got Better: One of the party is infected with the Canterbury Plague, either during a visit to Tamanrasset, or by working with one of the banestorm artifacts that passed through the base. His change in state does not last long, though, as the first time he travels away from Homeline his unit of the collective intelligence can no longer communicate with the others. As an individual it is just weak enough to be fought off like a lowly common cold.

Now the character has the unshakable feeling that something was wrong with him for a few days -- why did he act so stupidly? -- and that Tamanrasset had something to do with it. The problem is convincing the rest of the world of it.

The Odor of Sanctity: Charles de Foucauld was a French hermit of some interest to the Vatican. He lived the last years of his life near Tamanrasset, and a few enthusiastic thinkers believe that whatever is going on in the desert is

related to his mystic presence. They would like very much to get on the scene and investigate. Infinity would like it very much if they did not -- preferably without their figuring out that Infinity cares.

Using the Ahaggar Banestorm in Other Settings

A close parallel of Tamanrasset already exists in fantasy form: **GURPS Banestorm.** The major difference is that Yrth's incoming problems are geographically diffuse. While a GM needs to keep those to maintain one of that setting's major foundations, it's not a great stretch to decree that some occur in one location only. Put that location somewhere in the Great Desert not too far from the border with Caithness, situate some Knights of the Stone to watch it, and you've got the necessary elements.

In other fantasy settings, the banestorm will be a new factor, but most fantasy settings have a complex metaverse to call odd visitors from. Declare some obscure spot in a desert to be a weak point into the outer planes, then start throwing elementals and dark dwarfs at your players.

A hole in Algerian space-time is similarly easy to use in pulp settings, though given the isolation of the area until the 1950s the emphasis will need to shift from protecting the world to protecting the fort and the people of the oasis (note that the oasis town was quite small back then). This particular take on the banestorm has a few unique advantages. Charles de Foucauld was an interestingly saintly man and scholar of the Tuareg, the backdrop is of the world preparing to tear itself apart in war, and one can use the *L´gion ´trangère* to man the fort.

SF settings can use the basic concepts of the Ahaggar Banestorm by translating them to deep space. Turn the fort into a formerly decommissioned military station floating many AU away from anything and the banestorm into a "rogue jump point" or whatever other terminology fits the campaign's terminology. Slew the incoming items away from Earth archaeology and history to mysterious artifacts of lost or unknown races and you're ready to go.

Suggested Reading

- Tamanrasset and Ahaggar portion of Michael Palin's *Sahara*
- Stock Photos of the Ahaggar Mountains and surrounding desert
- Biography of Charles de Foucauld
- **GURPS Warehouse 23** (of course)

Contagion!

for *d20 System*

by Michael Tresca

The threat of disease is always a problem in medieval and Renaissance societies. Even with magic, the possibility of a plague raging out of control is ever present. In the *d20 System,* perhaps the only thing worse than an outbreak of the plague is an outbreak of undead.

A variety of undead have the ability to reproduce by killing living humanoids. In the case of the mohrg, any creature killed can acquire the zombie template, including animals. So what's to keep vampires from taking over the world?

Monster Spawn Rate Spawned Bodak 1 day Bodak Ghoul/Ghast 1 day Humanoid Ghoul/Ghast Mohrg 1d4 days Any Zombie Shadow 1d4 rounds Humanoid Shadow Spectre 1d4 rounds Humanoid Spectre Vampire 1d4 days Humanoid or Monstrous Humanoid Vampire Spawn Wight 1d4 rounds Humanoid Wight Wraith 1d4 rounds Humanoid Wraith

Outbreaks

There are many forms of outbreaks, graded progressively more and more dangerous.

Endemic

Endemic outbreaks are the typical number of undead encountered as per their description. Swarms or packs of undead vary in size, from 5 to 14 for mohrgs (four mohrgs and 10 zombies). The total humanoid casualties is at least equal to the number of undead created, but there can certainly be more, up to an additional 4d10 deaths. It takes 1d20 days to form an endemic.

For the most part, these outbreaks are restricted to lonely cabins, entire families, or several farmers spread out across a large swath of terrain (1d20 miles). The contagion is usually contained to natural borders. This sort of outbreak is still manageable by adventurers. There are the usual chances of encountering the undead in the area. The undead contagion should have a 20% chance of being encountered on any encounter table.

Epidemic

An epidemic outbreak takes place in a populated area. Multiply the undead's swarm, pack, or mob numbers by 1d10 to get the total number of undead. Living humanoid casualties are double the number of undead. It takes 1d100 days to form an epidemic.

At this point, the resident humanoid population will mobilize a major effort to control the contagion. The contagion extends over 1d100 miles. The undead contagion should have a 40% chance of being encountered on any encounter table.

Plaque

Plagues are bad news. When a plague strikes a fantasy world, the contagion undead outnumber the living. Multiply the undead's swarm, pack, or mob numbers by 10d10 to get the total number of undead. It takes 1d12 months to spread a plague.

A plague can be the basis for an entire campaign, as the undead plague rages out of control. It encompasses an entire

continent. The undead contagion has a 60% chance of being encountered on any encounter table.

Pandemic

A pandemic has taken over the entire fantasy world. Living humanoids are rare and waging a losing battle; only those who hide or are sufficiently powerful to keep the undead at bay can survive. The problem is that everyone has to sleep sometime. It takes 1d20 years to spread a pandemic.

Most beings that have an extraplanar means of escaping the world have left, leaving only a few defenders and the weak that have all but given up hope. This is a world that cries out for heroes. There is an 80% chance of the undead type appearing on any encounter table.

Vectors

Every undead is different. It's up to heroic characters to stop the spread. In fact, even evil characters that are not undead might find themselves working with the living just to survive.

Bodaks

Bodaks are powerful, extraplanar monstrosities capable of killing with a mere gaze. They are not native to the Prime Material Plane, but once summoned can wreak havoc on a community. They are invulnerable to normal weapons and resistant to most forms of damage.

Fortunately, bodaks are vulnerable to sunlight. They are also poorly organized beings, though they sometimes travel in gangs of up to four. With enough victims, bodaks can turn an entire town into a deadly, chaotic melee. It should be noted that spawned bodaks are not under the control of other bodaks, and thus do not necessarily share the same aims and goals as its creator.

Ghouls/Ghasts

Ghouls and their larger cousin, ghasts, are a highly dangerous contagion. They have no real weaknesses except the craving for living flesh. They're even resistant to turning by clerics. Ghasts are even worse, capable of incapacitating opponents before they come near.

The one saving grace of a ghoul/ghast contagion is that it takes one full day (at midnight) for the ghoul to rise as undead. Given that ghouls and ghasts are fond of eating corpses, they may often inadvertently eat their future spawn. Thus, ghouls and ghasts unintentionally control their own population. A risen ghoul or ghast is inevitably an accident, a creature suffering from ghoul fever that was able to escape but later died from the disease. Because the disease has an incubation period of 1 day, there is enough time for the contagion to be averted through judicious use of the Heal skill or a remove disease spell.

Mohrgs

Being the spirits of mass murderers, mohrgs are the most likely to go on a contagion spree, killing everything in sight until they are finally destroyed. This personality trait makes mohrgs the most likely to cause an undead plague.

The other attribute that makes mohrgs unique is their ability to turn any living creature into a zombie. Thus, mohrgs might turn rats, dogs, cattle, and virtually any other wildlife into zombies, creating a sort of zombie wasteland. Fortunately, it takes 1d4 days for a creature killed by a mohrg to rise up as a zombie. Unfortunately, if the creature has been slain it's very likely its allies are lying dead next to it.

The most dangerous mohrgs encountered are mohrg gangs. Mohrg gangs are usually the result of murderers who have

been hung en masse, and they immediately resume their murderous spree upon rising up from the dead. A town beset by multiple mohrgs has little hope of survival.

Fortunately, mohrgs are highly disorganized beings, generally uninterested in working together or ordering their zombies to do anything more than kill, kill, and kill some more.

Shadows

Shadows are not particularly organized and tend to attack the nearest living beings, thus discouraging the likelihood of a shadow army. Shadows are relatively weak undead, but they have the important trait of being incorporeal. As incorporeal beings, they are difficult for a community to ward off. Despite their name, shadows have no vulnerability to light. Shadow attacks have the added disadvantage of incapacitating their foes; a victim sufficiently drained of Strength can't move and can then be killed at the shadow's leisure. Shadows drain Strength, an attribute sometimes in short supply in civilized communities; strapping farmers and the like are less likely to fall prey to such attacks.

By far the best defense against shadows is a well-lit room. Though the light does not deter them, it certainly negates their biggest advantage: darkness. Though must undead are active at night because they loathe sunlight, shadows are almost undetectable in low light areas (+12 to Hide).

Spectres

Spectres are lawful, so they are fully capable of organizing themselves into large groups, strategizing, and planning long-term assaults against their enemies. Spectres combine the incorporeal traits with shadows with a higher hit dice and the ability to drain levels. Commoners aren't usually very high level, so a swarm of spectres (up to 11) can easily overwhelm a community. Worse, spectres create their own spawn within 1d4 rounds. Equipped with the ability to inflict grievous damage and a fast spawn rate, spectres are second only to mohrgs in their threat to a community.

The only saving grace is the spectre's vulnerability to sunlight. Still, that's not enough to stop a determined spectre. Since spectres fly, they can cover a lot of ground in one night. No natural obstacle can hinder them, making it possible for them to spread their contagion far and wide.

The spectre's unnatural aura should not be discounted. Spectres can disrupt communities not by slaying humanoids but by attacking two staples of humanoid society: cattle and horses. If the cattle are driven off, an important source of milk and meat is lost. If the horses are driven off, transportation grinds to a halt. Spectres seeking to take over a town go after the animals first, trapping the remaining humans and starving them to death.

Vampires

Of all the undead, vampires are the easiest to contain. Although this might seem strange, given the power of vampires, they have a myriad of weaknesses that contain the beings. For one, vampires must be invited into a dwelling, preventing them from attacking populated areas without careful planning. They can't stand the odor of garlic, don't like mirrors, and are held at by holy symbols. In populated areas, all three are in abundance, preventing vampires from getting very far. Finally, vampires can't cross running water; since many towns are on or near rivers, this limits the spread of vampires considerably.

Then there's the possibility that the vampire has no interest in actually turning the entire population into vampire spawn. Although it is not explicitly stated, vampires enjoy draining the blood of other creatures. They presumably can't drain vampire spawn, so any vampire populace requires its own \u201cherd\u201d of living beings. That said, vampires could subsist on farm animals if they so chose, as they are not required to drain humanoids.

Taking all these factors into account, most vampires prefer to work from behind the scenes. Although it's possible for a pack of vampires to gather in one place, it's unlikely they will spread their spawn very far unless it serves a purpose.

Wights

Wights are corporeal undead, stronger than ghouls but weaker than mohrgs. They are not vulnerable to sunlight, so wights can roam above ground at will. Generally, wights tend to be tied to their barrows, but there is no requirement that they stay in one place. Thus, a determined wight might venture beyond its tomb to terrorize the locals.

Wights drain energy upon attacking, making them extremely deadly to low-level commoners. An army of wights could easily be created as they roam the land, killing whomever they meet and adding the wights to their legions.

Fortunately, wights are physical beings; anything that prevents a living humanoid from traveling is likely to stop a wight (strong currents, dangerous precipices, strong thickets). On the other hand, wights never tire and can walk wherever their feet take them, be it a desert or even the bottom of the ocean floor.

Wraiths

Wraiths are almost exactly like spectres in every respect except one: They drain Constitution, making it more difficult for a wraith to slay and create a spawn. Their tactics are otherwise the same, targeting animals first. Like spectres, wraiths are lawful evil and thus entirely capable of organizing their spawn into armies.

Preventing a Contagion

Stopping an undead contagion is straightforward: destroying the source. Still, sometimes that sheer scope of the threat is impractical. By far the better method is to detect and destroy the outbreak before it spreads. Some spells are particularly useful in this regard, especially detect undead, which allows suspicious characters to detect the auras of undead. Incorporeal undead are fond of sitting in walls, waiting for citizens to go to sleep before pouncing on them.

Another useful spell is consecrate. Nightly castings of hallow spells help deter undead being spawned. This is one reason why crypts are often under churches, ensuring that the dead maintain their peaceful rest without interruption. Most hallowed are have daylight affixed to them, ensuring a perpetual sanctuary that few undead can approach.

Fighting a Contagion

The challenge in defeating an undead contagion is that negative energy spreads with little effort, often as a byproduct of violence against living humanoids. There is no equivalent in nature, requiring clerics and paladins to fill in the gaps. Undead can quickly outpace wielders of positive energy. That's why the elven wizard Haelosnae, after decades of research, came to a solution: the optim.

Optims are creatures summoned from the Positive Energy Plane. Haelosnae summoned optims specifically to reproduce at a rate that can match an undead outbreak. Since optims instinctively loathe undead and are capable of reproducing by feeding off of living beings, they can quickly route an undead army.

Size/Type: Small Outsider (Extraplanar)
Hit Dice: 9d8 (40 hp)
Initiative: +13
Speed: Fly 50 ft. (perfect) (10 squares)
Armor Class: 29 (+1 size, +9 Dex, +9 deflection), touch 29, flat-footed 20
Base Attack/Grapple: +5/-3
Attack: Shock +18 melee touch (2d8 positive energy)
Full Attack: Shock +18 melee touch (2d8 positive energy)
Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks: Positive energy aura, sunlight burst
Special Qualities: Create spawn, darkvision 60 ft., detect undead, flight, immunity to fire

Saves: Fort +6, Ref +15, Will +9
Abilities: Str 1, Dex 29, Con 10, Int 15, Wis 16, Cha 12
Skills: Heal +9, Hide +25, Knowledge (Arcana) +8, Knowledge (The Planes) +8, Listen +17, Move Silently +21, Search +14, Spellcraft +10, Spot +17, Survival +15. **Feats:** Alertness, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse
Environment: Positive Energy Plane
Organization: Solitary
Challenge Rating: 6
Treasure: None
Alignment: Always neutral
Advancement: 10-18 HD (Medium)
Level Adjustment: --

Optims appear as brilliant, spiky spheres that are constantly rotating. They fly about with a sonorous hum. Each optim is believed to have a hum frequency that is unique. An optim's body sheds as much light as a torch.

Combat

Optims find undead offensive and immediately swoop in to attack them.

Create Spawn (Su)

An optim can drain the excess negative energy off of a living being to create another version of itself. On a successful attack, the target must make a Fort save (DC 18) or lose all of its excess hit points are drained. 1d4 rounds later, the optim reproduces via fission to create another optim.

Detect Undead (Su)

Optims can detect undead as per the spell as if cast by a 9th level cleric, at will.

Positive Energy Attack (Su)

An optim's attack actually heals living creatures of 2d8 points of damage. It only inflicts damage to negative energy beings, such as undead. If a being is at full hit points, it gains the hit points as temporary hit points. These temporary hit points fade after 1d20 rounds. If the creature' s hit points double its normal total, it must make a Fortitude save (DC 20) or explode in a riot of energy.

Positive Energy Aura (Su)

Every undead creature that comes within 15 feet of the optim is automatically affected as if the optim had turned it. This doesn't cost a turning attempt, and the optim doesn't have to roll turning damage (it automatically affects all undead in a 15-foot burst), but it only turns undead with Hit Dice equal to or less than the optim's effective Hit Dice as if it were a 9th-level cleric. Just as with normal turning, the optim can't affect undead that have total cover relative to him or her.

Sunburst (Su)

Once per day, an optim can give off a blast of energy equivalent to a sunburst spell as cast by a cleric of 9th-level.

Pyramid Review

Vampire: Dark Influences

Published by White Wolf Publishing, Inc.

Designed by Michael Miller, David Raabe, Ken Cliffe, & Steve Wieck

Art, graphic design by Pauline Benney, Brom, Cyril Van Der Haegen, Marko Djurdjevic, Travis Ingram, Roberto Marchesi, Jean-Sebastien Rossbach, Jeff Rebner, Cathy Wilkins, Andy Trabbold, Michael Phillippi, Tomasz Jedruszek, Avery Butterworth, Shane Coppage, Udon, Mark Nelson, Vince Locke, Torstein Nordstrand

Five Player Cards, 25 Kindred Cards, 30 Event Cards, 105 Blood/Regnancy Tokens, one 10-sided die; b&w, boxed; two to five players; $14.99

They may now have a partner in on-line gaming, but White Wolf is still branching out into other forms of tabletop play. Their long-standing World of Darkness RPG line *Vampire* now has a card game based on that property: *Vampire: Dark Influences.* The Prince, leader of the city's undead hordes, is tired of unlife after so many years and is entering a deep sleep to recharge his batteries. First, though, a successor must be chosen.

The object of the game is to gain the most influence among the vampires, making you the new Prince of the city.

The play area is a power structure, a six-row pyramid built from cards with six bloodsuckers along the base and a single vampire -- the retiring Prince -- at the top. They're laid out like a checkerboard so the cards only connect at the corners. Each player gets a clan (a "tribe" of vampires), an Event Card, and a set of 10 blood/regnancy tokens with their clan's symbol.

The game plays out over six turns, each divided into two parts: the Blood Placement and Blood Resolution phases. First, everyone takes turns placing blood tokens from their pool on Kindred Cards in the pyramid, though holding a few back is important. Then players alternate "activating" those tokens to gain support for their bid for Prince, or trying to oust opponents who have done the same. Die rolls determine success, though bonuses and other benefits are available from the Event Cards. A player can force another to play tokens where they want, prevent combat on certain Kindred Cards, or seize Initiative.

Each Player Card lists a clan Discipline, a power that assists in allegiance attempts or combat, though it costs a blood from the pool. Tokens also determine Initiative, so the pool with the most counters in it starts the phase. The pool grows as a contender goes up the pyramid, gaining more powerful allies. Each Kindred Card lists a bonus from +1 to +3, and this is added to their row number to get a scoring value -- that is, a +1 vampire in the first row is worth two points, but seven if he's the Prince on row six. Even without the Prince's trust, winning over a variety of clans or covenants spells a sizable point bonus, and when the sixth turn ends the rival with the highest score wins.

It must be nice to be one of the bigger gaming companies on the block and able to afford nice components, but it's even nicer to be the one buying those swell pieces. The Kindred and Player cards are more like slates, and they're big. The tokens are solid (though it's hard to pick out the right symbols in monochrome, and separation into baggies prevents fitting them all into the box), and while the Event Cards could have been one stock higher they're still nice.

The art is mostly pencil work, but the illustrations are easily on par with their RPG books. The only two points worth mentioning both relate to text: The stylized covenant and clan names listed on the Kindred Cards are difficult to read at any distance, and the rule book is tiny, like those folded into collectible card game tuck boxes. Beyond that, the production values on this set are first rate. You even get a 10-sided die even though the booklet (in contradiction with the box) suggests you must supply your own (it won't hurt to have a few more). There's a similar underestimation with the blood tokens -- but better too many than too few, right?

The rules seem pretty thorough, though they have to be given all the little things you have to remember. They fall into place after a game or two, but there's still a gray area or two that have "FAQ" written all over them (like what constitutes "adjacent" within the power structure). Space may be an issue as well: Laid out, the pyramid measures about 37" from side to side and another 30" top to bottom. Finally, the Disciplines on the Player Cards are, frankly, kind of boring. They're useful for combat or allegiance rolls, but nothing that really mixes up the dynamics in special ways. Only the player going first in Initiative matters because everyone goes clockwise from there, so striving for it feels less important than it ought to be.

Now that the criticisms are out of the way, this is a good game. It's competitive without involving mind-bending strategies that extend three turns forward; there's a small amount of resource management without crippling quantities of math; and there are enough surprises to keep any one tactic from handing the game to anyone (just climbing the pyramid straight to the Prince is no guarantee of victory). The Event Cards are delightfully subtle -- what looks at first like a dull and unimaginative addition to the deck could turn out to be the perfect card that saves your pasty white behind.

Vampire: Dark Influences is a fine game of cutthroat strategy and last-minute turnabouts. The designers have covered a lot of ground and given their audience a fairly fast and well-constructed card game that captures, if not the specific feel of the RPG, at least the better sensibilities of the thrilling power plays that go into it.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

RuneQuest Companion

Published by [Mongoose Publishing](#)

Written by Greg Lynch, Kenneth Hite, & Ian Belcher

Cover by Bob Cram, Dan Howard, & Jeff Koch

Illustrated by Bob Cram, Jeff Cram, Rick Hershey, Ryan Horvath, & Colin Throm 98-Page Black & White Hardcover; $24.95

The new *[RuneQuest](#)* from Mongoose Publishing reinvigorated an almost three-decades-old RPG classic. Although slightly leaner, the new version of the rules offered sound, if slightly old school, game play. Though not as old school as other games of its age, nor as mechanically abstract, the *Basic Rules* contained everything needed to play, but still there were things missing in comparison to previous incarnations of the game.

Most notably magic. The only type of magic available in the *Basic Rules* was Rune Magic, the powering of magic through attuned runes of power. The *RuneQuest Companion* addresses this omission by detailing four new types -- Divine Magic, Sorcery, Enchantment, and Spirit Magic. It also has new spells for all four, plus new character options, a discussion of what to do between adventures, rules for travel, and temple details.

The new character options add six new cultural backgrounds: Civilized (slightly more educated and technologically advanced), Mariner (island dwelling rather than sea going), Nomad (Arctic, Desert, and Temperate), and Primitive (representing Stone Age cultures). There are four new professions: Healer, Knight, Peddler, and Scribe, along with new Advanced Skills for Artistic Expression, Courtesy, Lore (Specific Theology), and Oratory. Stone Age weaponry is also detailed for the Primitive character. Finally, the character is given three cults to enroll in. Brethren of the Hunter venerate the hunt; Lightbearers bring light to humanity, alleviating suffering and darkness; and the Moon Maidens are beloved of mystics, confidence tricksters, and prostitutes. All useful stuff, though the cults will clearly need more color than is given here.

Divine Magic is only available to cult initiates, who must possess the Lore (Specific Theology) for their cult, and then through prayer at their temple. If available, a player must dedicate actual POW to the spell, fighting to hold it in his head almost Vancian style. Each Divine spell is a one-shot spell that costs no Magic Points to cast, and if the spell has magnitude, or levels of power, it can be split. So for example, a Shield spell known at magnitude 5 can be cast at magnitude 2 and the rest saved for later. Finally, up against Rune Magic, Divine Magic is doubly powerful.

Sorcery requires a character to either research or be taught a spell, acquiring a skill for the spell at the same time. Relatively weak, basic Sorcery spells cost no Magic Points to cast. If a sorcerer wants to do more with a basic spell, using the Manipulate skill to increase its magnitude, duration, range, number of targets, or even combine more than one spell, then he must expend Magic Points. This is where Sorcery becomes both powerful and flexible, the rules for manipulation being simple, clear, and accompanied by decent examples. And all, of this can be accomplished with the one dice roll.

With Enchantment, a caster can work any spell known permanently into any object that he can inscribe runes onto. The result is a permanent effect that lasts until the object is broken. The process takes many hours and the spell can come from any discipline. Unfortunately, no examples are given.

For the Spirit World, the nature of a spirit is defined in game terms, and how combat works between characters and

spirits. This is of course, difficult, because spirits are incorporeal, and a character will need magic or enchanted weaponry to damage the spirit. Another danger is that of possession, which can be covert or overt. Only the Disease Spirit is detailed, long with the Ghost the Wraith.

How do these four magical disciplines relate to a player character? Well, he has new skills to learn. The Priest profession found in the Basic Rules could substitute the Lore (Specific Theology) for his Lore (Theology) Advanced Skill and thus start with a Divine spell, but that is only this review's suggestion. As to the other magical disciplines, the GM will have to come up with something similar, because no guidance is given on those either. As strictly written from both the **Basic Rules** and the **RuneQuest Companion,** the only method of casting spells for starting characters is still Rune Magic.

The other half of the **RuneQuest Companion** is devoted to time in-between adventures. Places to visit from hamlets to large cities; making money from means other than loot -- including crafting items, getting a job, performing, or stealing; item costs by region type; and even building a home. This is followed by chapters devoted to land and sea travel (plus a quick guide to nautical combat), and lastly temples. All of this is competently written, useful to have, and that is all.

Physically, the **RuneQuest Companion** is another slim hardback, again done in gray shades. Unfortunately, the artwork is not as good, the contents not quite as complete, and there is the feeling that this volume has been rushed. This shows in the four chapters on magic, which are not all equal. You get the full feel of how Divine Magic and Sorcery work because there are plenty of examples. None though are given for either Enchantment or the Spirit World. Why not include example enchanted items and show how they are so enchanted? As for the Spirit World, several spirits are given in game terms, a couple of spells to counter them, and a little about the dangers of possession, but what you are not told is how it relates to anything else, or indeed the point of it.

Then there is the matter of cost, because what you are getting in the **RuneQuest Companion** is not a companion volume to the **Basic Rules.** Rather, this is the other half of the Basic Rules. Put the two books together and what you have is a slim and expensive core book. When you compare the paired volumes with many other recent releases, those titles are usually cheaper, in color, and come with more content.

Overall, the **RuneQuest Companion** is not as satisfying as the **Basic Rules.** While such additions as Divine Magic and Sorcery are decently developed, much of this volume feels rushed. Nor does it help that the new forms of magic have not been wholly integrated with details found in the **Basic Rules,** making them accessible to beginning characters. Underdeveloped and disappointing where it really matters, the **RuneQuest Companion** contains the necessary rules to expanding magic in the game, but which should never have been separated from the **Basic Rules.**

--Matthew Pook

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Happy Rails To You

Back in the 1990s, when arcades were more than a collection of *Dance Dance Revolution* machines and a thousand iterations of next-generation Whack-a-Moles, there was a type of game called the "rail" shooter. For those who aren't hep on the lingo that all the groovy kids are using nowadays, let me explain. In many ways, rail shooters resemble any other first-person shooter computer game, akin to **Halo, Half-Life,** or **Frogger.** Unlike those other games, however, rail shooters confine the players to a predefined path, akin to the old carnival rides where visitors would roll along in rickety carts along a rusty rail. In many of these games it's possible to influence decisions somewhat -- such as by shooting a particular wall to enable a shortcut, or killing all the enemies which opens a new way -- but mostly players are confined to their rail.

The disadvantages of a "rail"-type game are obvious. Primary among these is the fact that the riders of the rails have little to no say in their ultimate destination (although, in RPGs and rail-shooter video games alike, there's always the option of dying along the way).

The advantages of a rail game are a little less obvious. Primary among these is the ability to deliver a much "richer," more interesting experience than is possible through more freeform exploratory means. As an analogy, let me bring up the Haunted Mansion ride, which is itself in various Walt Disney theme parks. (I've only ridden the one in Walt Disney World, but I assume the experience is roughly the same wherever you go.) At this exhibit, riders are placed within a car (itself surprisingly similar to those found on other rides) and taken through the mansion, where they get to witness many unusual and interesting sites: a mirror that reflects unseen ghostly hitchhikers within the car the riders are in, a crystal ball with a head that seems to talk and follow the viewer, a dinner scene with spectral dancers and flying objects, and the George-Lucas-improved version of *It's a Wonderful Life* where Mr. Potter shoots first. (Just kidding about the last one . . . riders couldn't handle anything *that* horrifying.)

Although the existence of the car-riding aspect of the Haunted Mansion ride is somewhat incongruous -- most mansions, haunted or otherwise, tend to be devoid of light rail systems -- all other aspects of the attraction are a delight. Amazingly, the ride still holds up amazingly well over 35 years later. And the primary reason behind this (besides the creativity and thoughtfulness of the original developers) is because the rider is limited in their options and experiences. Exhibits that wouldn't withstand close scrutiny or viewing from anything but a specific angle are whizzed by in a few seconds, and all parts of the ride have been developed to ensure that participants wouldn't spoil the effects by encountering it at anything less than an optimum condition.

While a first-time rider might believe that the Haunted Mansion would be vastly improved if the visitor was permitted full freedom of movement and exploration (or, at least, more options for movement and exploration, as the original ride's concept called for), in reality the Full-Movement Haunted Mansion would have to be completely re-envisioned for the difference in experience; in all likelihood, I posit that such a ride would be unable to withstand over three decades of visitors.

Which brings me to RPGs.

Really, there are few terms that elicit a stronger reaction to many gamers than the notion of railroading. In fact, when presented with the choice of either participating in a game which admits to railroading or being whacked in the groin with a golf club, 87% of all gamers responded, "Driver or putter?"

But does railroading have more to offer than the agonized groans of gamers worldwide? (That's rhetorical.)

Before I answer myself, let me note that I tend to think of railroading in two broad classes. The first is the type that most people are familiar with, where the individual choices made by the players will have little effect on the larger adventure. The type of tale where the heroes opt against going to the sinister castle in lieu of visiting the town or exploring the mysterious barn but, no matter what choices they make, fate will mysteriously conspire to have them within that castle by hook or by crook.

But there's a larger form of railroading that, I believe, tends to be much more accepted, appreciated, and even expected by some fans: macro railroading. Especially in established (often licensed) universes, there's a certain desire among many -- although not by any means all -- players to follow in the footsteps of canon. Thus in a World War II campaign there's a joy that comes with knowing D-Day is coming, in a *Star Wars* game there's the expectation that there will be a Battle of Yavin, and in a **Torg** series the Space Gods and Tharkhold will eventually become major players.

This isn't to say that, in any of these games, the group couldn't decide to veer off the "rails" that the grandiose train of the campaign is taking. (Indeed, my first-ever published gaming article was about how to shake up a potential *Star Wars* campaign.) But I suspect part of the fun for many people is in being part of the larger whole, of knowing what's going to happen but not necessarily how they will fit into it. In fact, many campaigns have problems when the setting veers too much off the expected for too long. I know one trouble some folks have had with long-running **Deadlands** campaigns, for example, is that events transpire to create a world that is far afield from what participants expect. ("Okay; it's 1876 . . . who are the Presidents, what the heck is going on with the War, and . . . what's going on?")

But in defense of the micro-railroading, it's still possible to defend this in some situations. For example, an adventure based on the **Groundhog Day**-style "same day over and over" premise requires a *lot* of railroading, at least in the beginning, in order to make a lick of sense. And if the GM has certain tricks up his sleeves -- such as pre-planned scripts, real-world puzzles, or even meals -- then a certain amount of railroading can help ensure that the adventure runs smoothly. And it's also possible for the "rails" to be hidden from view, or at least make them less noticeable; the classic example is if the GM offers two doors for the players to choose from but he needs the heroes to meet Character A before meeting Character B. Well, regardless of which door is chosen, guess which character is behind it?

Ultimately, I think the nature of railroading often stems from the skill used by the conductor and the crafters. (How's that for a metaphor transition?) I've mentioned both the Haunted Mansion and the old trail-pulled carnival rides; while they both have riders and rails, the gulf between the two is so substantial that they can hardly be considered to be in the same league. With one type of railroad you can't wait to get off, while the other type you scarcely notice you're on . . . and even if you do, you may be counting the moments 'til you can get on again.

--Steven Marsh

The Omniscient Eye

When Standing To The Left of the Nobles, What Rights Did I Have Left?

> **In traditional fantasy worlds, you have lots of kings, queens, and sundry nobles running the show, but common-born adventurers have the freedom to move around, slay dragons, and sell the hoard. Well, disbelief has to be suspended in this regard; it is a fantasy.**
>
> **But many science-fiction backgrounds have monarchies and aristocracies as well, from the classic *Traveller* game and a certain galaxy far, far away to books by writers like David Weber, Lois Bujold, or Larry Niven (I'm thinking of *The Mote in God's Eye,* of course). Except for the right to elect your government, many of these fictional systems provide an amazing amount of personal and economic freedom to their common citizens.**
>
> **So my question is this: Is there a historical precedent for hereditary oligarchies (styled monarchies, aristocracies, or simply "juntas") where the common people had rights like the freedom of speech or the rule of law, but no political representation? Did any of these systems last long enough for a truly hereditary ruling class?**
> *--Onno Meyer*

There's usually a direct correlation between personal liberties and participation in the political process. The notion of what we'd call "civil" or "human rights," particularly with wits notion of people sharing a fundamentally equal worth, is alien to most historical political philosophies once you get into societies more sophisticated than nomadic tribes and small villages. Just about everybody, everywhere, had an implied right to hold property of various kinds (family often fell into that category; land might not, and is a complex question in its own right) and a right to compensation for damage to that property by others. One might even find an implied right to request judgment and mediation in case of disputes from a theoretically neutral third party. Beyond that, what rights one might have, member of the political establishment or no, are a patchwork.

The starting point for understanding what rights someone had is that there were few if any rights which any society regarded as applying to all humanity, or even everyone in the society. Any rights were arrived at by arrangements within or between limited groups, won through violence, negotiation, and the slow evolution of tradition, and outsiders were not party to those arrangements. This can be seen in the convention that foreigners and certain disadvantaged natives in many places had *no* rights of their own. Some might have indirect protection as the subjects of somebody else's authority (for example, a slave might not be able to file a suit against someone who struck him, but the slave's master could sue someone for damaging his property; the same could be the case for unmarried women and the head of a family), but others had no legal protection whatsoever.

Moreover, much of what we regard as civil rights weren't addressed one way or another in many places. Most ancient law codes were far simpler than modern ones, and more concerned with establishing legal forms (conduct of courts, law governing marriage, inheritance, and other family issues). Law pertaining to individuals outlined what was forbidden (murder, rape, theft, blasphemy) and what was obligatory (taxes, compulsory labor) rather than what was permitted but voluntary. Many political systems had limited statutory restrictions on many kinds of personal expression and patchy restrictions on economic activity. However, they didn't *protect* those kinds of rights either.

So without the idea of a "standard" package of rights, what kinds of rights were commonly held? Freedom of speech or, more broadly, freedom of expression, is a tricky one. One of the large factors behind that is that while a ruler wouldn't mind sending out Ye Olde Thoughte Police to clamp down on anyone who grumbled about him, he simply didn't have the bureaucracy to exercise that level of control or the resources to build one. Laws concerning expression

were largely concerned with what we'd regard as slander and libel. For example, early Roman law set out remarkably harsh penalties for notably boisterous public insults and scurrilous, defamatory poems. But it appears that these kinds of laws were as concerned with maintaining the public peace as much as protecting individuals. Of course, in places laws against insults were escalated to require deference to officials and members of the upper classes, but these were far from universal.

Moreover, even those laws might be circumvented in times of political unrest. A surprising level of invective went into any expression of disapproval. A petition protesting against a particular king or bishop might, in addition to listing legitimate grievances, label him a murderer, blasphemer, and sodomite as well. It was simply a part of how politics was conducted, and people making such declarations typically had angry mobs or armed troops behind them, so such a statement probably wouldn't be prosecuted.

However, even if it was technically legal to declare "The king is a fink!", to do so loudly and consistently was to attract the ire of a very powerful opponent. A peasant who spoke up frequently against his overlord would soon find his taxes assessed as extensively as possible, permission to do various things (borrow an ox and plow for his fields, marry off his daughter, etc.) usually granted in return for a fee, denied, and so on. Even participants in a relatively democratic regime could find themselves on the wrong end of government attention. The civic government of Florence, for example, was routinely used by its high officers to punish their enemies with heavy tax burdens. There might not be a statutory punishment for expressing an unpopular opinion, but there could be retribution nevertheless.

The few cases where there seems to be some kind of recognition of right to free expression were at least nominally democratic or representative governments. Certain Greeks held up the right to speak freely as an important one, as opposed to restrictions which might be imposed under a tyrant. That meant, at the time, a ruler who came to power by "extra-constitutional" means such as a violent coup, not necessarily as a synonym for a dictator or oppressor. A tyrant might hold dictatorial power, but usually got it through popular support rather than through maintaining a powerful governmental machine. Still, a tyrant had a definite interest in suppressing diversity of opinion, so members of a vocal but unpopular minority could get crushed by their fellow citizens.

After the collapse of Greek democracy, a formal right to free speech didn't appear in the west until the late 17th century (about a century after formal laws against sedition, as it happens), when it showed up in a specifically political context. Members of the English House of Commons were granted the right of free speech *while in Parliament.* They could speak as they wanted to, so long as it fell within the business of the day, without fear of retaliation. From there, it was a slow evolution to modern ideas of rights applying to broader and broader categories of people.

So much for freedom of speech. "Rule of law" is a similarly dubious matter. Just about everybody had recourse to mediation of disputes, either under a written law code or a commonly understood body of traditional law. Even in more aristocratic societies, most people had access to court systems and could file suits against their peers and even their betters, and it was even possible to get reasonably impartial judges, though it could take some searching to find them. In the later Middle Ages, the kings of England were able to enhance their power by making royal judgment (in the form of royally appointed judges) more available through the kingdom. This was primarily a venue for the lesser nobility and moneyed commoners, but it did give greater access to relatively impartial courts to people with relatively little stake in the political system.

Unfortunately, in most cases the law usually made no pretense of equality. As far back as the Code of Hammurabi, elders, heads of families, and members of upper classes were typically entitled to greater damages if harmed than members of the lower classes and reduced punishments if they caused harm in return. Courts in societies practicing one religion might not accept testimony from members of others (for example, the testimony of Christians was discounted in Muslim courts, that of Jews in Christian courts, and so on), and the testimony of members of particularly low classes might be discounted in suits against people far above them on the social ladder. Torture might be applied as a matter of course to very low class witnesses. And different people even had different bodies of law applied to them. The most obvious example of inequality under law is probably Medieval ecclesiastical courts. The church had its own body of law and its own courts which followed their own rules, which were extremely lenient towards defendants. The church was powerful enough to make civil authorities defer to ecclesiastical courts and allow priests, monks, and a few other fortunate groups to be tried only there. Shopping for jurisdictions (that is, finding a court

favorable to your cause), a practice discouraged in many modern legal traditions, was par for the course.

Related to both free speech and rule of law is the right to petition. A number of societies (for example, the Byzantine and Ottoman empires) granted everyone the right to petition their ruler as a final appeal for court cases and a way to express grievances against lesser officials. Clearly, though, this is a very limited right, which can only be exercised by people who can physically reach the royal court and make it through the press of other petitioners to get the ruler's ear during the limited time he makes himself available. Moreover, this is arguably more an expression of a ruler's right to listen to anyone he wants to, regardless of what his subordinates and lesser nobles might say, than a commoner's right to express himself, particularly since audiences with commoners were pointedly aimed at the activities of nobles and officials.

The right to travel was sporadically restricted. Members of some classes were, of course, tied to a particular plot of land, required to work it unless granted permission from their landlord. However, during many periods, a significant proportion of the population weren't restricted to their homes. Rome, Byzantium, and China closely regulated permission to use imperial roads, but that sounds far more restrictive than it actually was. Permission to use the roads in that context actually meant permission to use government-maintained roadside facilities, posts where couriers and other official travelers could change horses and rest for the night. Others might travel on imperial highways (and, in China, extensive networks of government-maintained canals) but had to fend for themselves when it came to food and lodging and get out of the way in a big hurry when official travelers came thundering down the road. Instead, the main restrictions on travel were practical. Even within a culturally homogeneous area, travel would be expensive, and moving between them, it could be difficult and dangerous as well.

Probably the most heavily regulated "rights" a character might have were economic. Many governments participated in maintaining monopolies. Production of particularly lucrative resources (for example, silk in the Byzantine empire or salt in Renaissance Venice) might be carried out by government-run companies or farmed out exclusively to a private concern. This would be done to ensure a strong source of revenue for the government. However, governments also helped maintain monopolies in which it had little direct interest. Guilds and chartered companies were given the right to control a particular trade or type of commerce. This was lucrative for the guild masters, purportedly established high standards of quality, and gave the government a single body to deal with in case it had a special need for ships, barrels, ironmongery, and so on.

Wage and particularly price controls also appeared sporadically. Rulers periodically set prices on various goods, usually in times of famine, warfare, and economic crisis, in an attempt to keep their armies supplied or, more often, to stave off bread riots and civil unrest. Controls on prices of bread and grain were occasionally useful for preventing price gouging during particularly hard times, but failed to prevent more widespread problems. The emperor Diocletian famously attempted to set the prices of just about every common commodity in order to prevent inflation, but his price edicts were widely ignored.

A set of rights probably not thought of today but widely controlled had to do with how one's wealth could be spent. Certain types of consumption and display were often governed by "sumptuary" laws. The purpose of sumptuary laws was purely to play up class distinctions, with upper classes typically having more choices in dress and other kinds of visible display available to them than those beneath them. Probably the best-know sumptuary regulation is the right of only the highest-class Romans to wear purple, but such laws were rampant through the Old World. Members of particular groups might have to wear particular emblems or styles of clothing (for example, Venetian Jews had to wear turbans, and prostitutes had to wear yellow), while the use of silk,

Recovered Hoard Tax Form 1066-Dragon, With Attached Schedule K

Of all the examples of questionable freedoms, the selling of a dragon's hoard is probably the most plausible. Looting is a time-honored fringe benefit for warriors. The leader of a dragon-slaying expedition would probably be able to claim the lion's share of the goods, but if the pile of treasure were legally considered the spoils of war, which seems likely, it wouldn't be subject to seizure or extraordinary taxation (*ordinary* taxation is another matter altogether). There are, though, some different legal possibilities. Many historical legal codes -- including English common law and Roman law -- recognized a difference between goods which have been lost and those which have been abandoned. Lost goods, if

cloth-of-gold, and other expensive materials might be an option limited to the upper classes.

So where does this leave PCs? The average person in any historical society is probably more restricted in his legal choices than someone in the modern West. However, he's also unlikely to be deprived of large blocks of rights. Rather, he'll be dealing with a patchwork of limitations where previous kings and legislatures have seen fit to enact them and unusual freedoms and privileges in areas they hadn't foreseen.

Following on the principle that rights are negotiated by groups within a society, it would probably be wise to build PCs as members of classes which had acquired at least some rights. Only slaves and the lowest peasants would have rights so restricted as to make an adventuring career completely impossible, and even in an aristocratic setting, relatively modern packages of rights might be available. Medieval guilds and civic governments (often the same thing), though usually under the vague general authority of a bishop or king, were granted the right to set their own laws and other procedures. Though technically commoners, city residents and guild members were allowed to create their own separate political context, in which they could exercise broader rights.

Depending on where they are, the right to be tried under one set of laws and regulations rather than another is a significant advantage. The right to be tried in an ecclesiastical court is one example. Being a Roman citizen provided similar advantages. Until the 3rd century, Roman citizenship was a privilege belonging to a minority of the empire's residents, and it granted better treatment from local authorities and quite possibly exemption from some provincial laws. In the Bible, Saint Paul used his Roman citizenship to avoid harsh treatment at the hands of the authorities. In areas with large communities of resident foreigners, rulers occasionally guaranteed them the right to settle their own affairs. In the later years of the Roman empire, the Roman emperor, who was at that point regarded as the ruler and protector of Christians worldwide, reached an agreement with the Sassanian Persian emperor to allow Christians living in Persian territory to have their own legal proceedings overseen by local bishops. A crime committed by a Christian against a non-Christian Persian would be handled under Persian law, but the Christians in Persia had the right to handle their internal affairs by themselves. Similar arrangements were reached in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance by small colonies of European merchants in Muslim areas.

The kinds of economic activity regulated by historical law were usually not terribly interesting for PCs: everyday craft work, running mills, and other enterprises necessary for the day-to-day operation of society. PCs are unlikely to have a strong desire to settle down and make a living as leather-workers or barrel-makers, and even if they do, it wouldn't be unreasonable to make them members of an appropriate guild anyway. Even where a government maintains a monopoly on a particularly lucrative and interesting type of production, PC might still be able to import their own (which, if they take it as loot, might be cheaper than conventional importation). About the only significant economic limitation adventuring PCs would face, beyond taxation, would be a local monopoly on trade with a given region, such as that granted to the British East India Company by Queen Elizabeth. Killing things and taking their stuff, particularly if done abroad, was largely unregulated.

Having rights can also be a factor of being in the right place at the right time in history. Civil rights for people outside of the ruling class tended to be fleeting because they usually appeared as part of a cycle leading towards either an aristocratic crackdown revoking them or an aristocratic collapse increasing them. It would be an unstable state of affairs stopping just short of coups and revolutions, but a GM could set a campaign in a place where commoners had successfully won rights from the ruling classes or the ruling classes had recently increased their power at the expense of the commons. The former happened by stages in England, leading through constitutional monarchy, increasing the size of the effective ruling class by fits and starts to more regions and broader classes of people (starting from the top

found, might be subject to claims from original owners or their heirs. It would be hard to establish prior ownership of a pile of gold coins, but notable heirlooms in a dragon's hoard might be the subject of lawsuits. Abandoned goods, though, can often be claimed by the people who find them. The contents of a dragon's hoard might be a mix of the two, lost goods where heirs of the former owners make themselves known and abandoned where they do not. No law code would require the finder of lost goods to assume the burden of proof, making him prove that there is no legitimate owner to what he has found, though he might be required to formally notify the government of his find so that appropriate taxes may be assessed.

of the economic ladder and trickling down), until becoming a more or less representative government a century or two ago. "The people" picked up rights along the way, but usually as a prelude or accompaniment to joining the voting classes. The latter has happened in a number of ways, most notably at the end of the Roman empire into the early Middle Ages. As a response to a collapse of law and government, people gave up freedoms to powerful magnates, who eventually crystallized into noblemen, in return for protection. Either of these situations seems most appropriate for a science-fictional monarchy or aristocracy.

Finally, there's a path particularly relevant to PC adventurers which can be used to go around most legal restrictions, and it's paved with gold, silver, and blood. While most rights and privileges may not be automatically *granted,* they can often be *purchased* or won on the battlefield. Remember, rights are gained through arrangements and agreements with people in a position to grant them. Most aristocratic and monarchical governments, while officially excluding the masses from circles of power, recognized a need for merchants, tradesmen, warriors, and others in their societies, which gave sufficiently competent commoners effective, if unofficial, power. Wealthy characters can buy freedom of speech. Mighty warriors can win respect and position through their deeds. If you don't have rights, go out and get them.

--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!

Like Masked Mother, Like Caped Child: The Amazonia Story

by Brian Rogers

Previously I described the concept of the super-continuum: a chart for tracking various types of supers presentations, how those presentations can work as games and how the iconic heroes average to the chart's center over time. While that article's sample character, Omniman, hits the supers sweet spot with a long personal story, there is another way: having a Legacy. Each generation has its own version of the hero, and each version has a well defined niche on the super-hero story chart.

Amazonia

Amazonia is a name adopted by women operating near the desert city of Palette over the last hundred years. It's hard to discern connections between them, in part because the desert sands hide many secrets, and in part because sometimes there isn't any.

The first Amazonia was the *Warrior Woman of the West,* the last of a line of Native American defenders who were remnants of the Anasazi. Members of that tribe were blessed with preternatural strength, speed, and animal speech as gifts from the spider goddess. When this last Anasazi settled near the mining town of Palette she raised the eyebrows of the local press. A weathered indigene horsewoman -- especially one with the speed of a horse and the strength of a bear -- was simply too good a story. Alas, their research was spotty, so the country received headlines and books on the newly Europeanized "Amazonia."

Amazonia aided the towns' eccentrics, widows, and tarnished roses against bandits, gunslingers, and unscrupulous miners, ultimately turning Palette into the "distaff boomtown." Over the next five decades Palette's history as a haven for prostitutes and artists made it "a Big Easy built on sand rather than mud." It was this liberalism and lack of local law that turned Palette into a rumrunner's haven and buried the city in a sandstorm of crime. Enter the second Amazonia, known as the *Sapphic Scourge of Suffragette City.*

Pricilla Starr was one of Palette's leading ladies; heir to a mining fortune, she spent her teen years in a British finishing school learning fencing, archery, and riding. Returning to a town in turmoil, Miss Starr adopted the legendary name, but dressed as a classic Amazon armed with technology (including a motorcycle and explosive or drugged arrows). She cut a swath through the underworld, acquiring information from nouveau riche mobsters as the British accented Miss Starr by day and disassembling their operations with a western twang by night. The pulps ate it up with a spoon: once again Amazonia was known from coast to coast. Miss Starr had the sense to step away from the role before it killed her. The war killed her instead, a Luftwaffe bomb cutting her life short as she aided the British war effort in 1940. Her secret revealed in her estate, Amazonia's adventures were adapted into a patriotic movie serial (convincing many that Amazonia had fought Nazis -- a myth continuing to this day).

The next Amazonia was less lionized: in 1951 Painted Sands Air Force Base went up perilously close to Palette, and an accident combining a prototype atomic plane, an arachnid alien spy, and an insecure mother had tragic consequences. Dorcas Cole's life as a *Firestorm Effect* started with super-human strength, animal speech, and an increase in self confidence. Over several months she became strident and territorial, lashing out at anyone who threatened her children -- starting with a local motorcycle gang, then the air force base, then the whole military, then all of "the damned warmongering men". At the end she was so powerful that the air force could not stop her, and she was contained by agents of THEM. While later generations cast Amazonia as a martyr, radiation had turned Dorcas Cole into the embodiment of society's fears of women in military geopolitics: headlines questioned if she was an *Altruistic Mother or Atomic Monster?*

In any event, her actions led to the closure of Painted Sands and a slump in the Palette economy. The city recovered as a haven for the counter-culture, a haunt of the hippies and artists through the 1960s and 1970s. The decision to re-open Painted Sands in 1983 (a pork project of the local Representative) set the city's liberal artistic chic against the state's conservative mores at the same time that Palette's new police chief set to quelling the town's drug trade. Tensions were running high and violence was in the air when the fourth Amazonia arrived -- a *Contemporary Cultural Costumed Crusader.*

Large animal veterinarian Anna Zone's research into her family tree revealed ties to the first Amazonia. Combining a medical mindset and her masters in Anthropology, Anna theorized that her animal empathy was the diluted remnant of Anasazi gifts, and experimented with a mix of hallucinogens to approach her lineage. This touched something primal, and once she came down Anna found she was superhumanly strong and fast, could talk to animals, see things outside of human perception, and slide into a "spirit realm" that surrounded Palette. That spirit realm has both practical aspects (Amazonia stores her bow and arrows within it for easy access) and wondrous ones, letting her traverse a shadowy reflection of this and other parallel realities. Amazonia now wears several masks -- icon, environmentalist, and super-hero -- but her real interest lies in exploring cultures and uncovering secrets, the greatest being the past of the women who share her name. She is often forced to use her powers to save the world, and to be perfectly honest she finds something satisfying in a good fight.

Since she is not as much of a crime-fighter as her peers, she shares Palette with two other heroes: Tunnel Rat (a mostly reformed were-rat with vigilante tendencies) and Coyote (a trickster whose powers are never quite what they seem). Anna retains an intermittent secret identity as a veterinarian-turned-hippie who hangs with the city's "mystical" crowd as a way to hone her own talents while avoiding the glare of fame. This community's unofficial head is Deacon Frost, Christian bookstore owner, and its mascot is Sarah Sands, an orphan with an incredible nose for trouble.

Amazonia in TSdX (215 points)

Body	16	**Mind**	nbsp; 7	**Soul**	13
Attack Value	14	**Defense Value**	12	**Health**	245

Characteristic Attributes

Features (2)	tall, leggy build gives appearance + increased run speed
Organizational Ties (6)	well connected to Palette "mystical community" (Moderate influence)

Firestorm Effect	**Description**
Special Movement (8)	Dimension Hop to the spirit real that overlaps Palette. From there she can dimension hop to other alternate Palettes.
Sixth Sense (2)	sense animal life and spirit realm fluxuations in a 1 Km radius (area 5)
Animal Control (2)	summon/control 5 animals in a 1Km area for 1 hour (area 5, duration 5)
Creation (2)	up to 5 kg of muscle powered weapons -- items stored in spirit realm
Telepathy (3)	animals only, read surface, transmit concepts. 1 mind in a 1Km range. (Targets 1, Range 3)
Combat Technique (2)	Blind Shooting; Steady Hand
Extra attacks (2)	has 3 attacks per round
Extra defenses (2)	has 3 defenses per round
Speed(3)	run at 1000 kph, +6 initiative
Attack Mastery (2)	gains +2 on all attack rolls
Defense Mastery (2)	gains +2 on all defense rolls
Divine Relationship (5)	can reroll 5 rolls per session, spirit real manipulation
Super-strength(5)	lift 30 tons, +50 on HTH damage; +20 on strength related rolls
Tough(5)	gains +100 health
Defects	**Description**

Marked (1)   Highly distinctive but small tattoo on small of back.
Nightmares (1)   Incomprehensible dreams of spiders and aliens.
Nemesis (1)   Arachnoid aliens

Skills

Animal Training -- horses (4)
Biological sciences -- zoology (2)
Medical -- Veterinary (3)
Riding -- horses (1)
Occult -- Native American rituals (2)
Wilderness survival -- desert (1)
Cultural Arts -- history, urban legends (1)
Etiquette -- mystic community (2)
Social Sciences -- sociology (3)

Other Legacies

Of course, there's also more than one type of Legacy hero.

Lineage: The hero is part of a line of heroes that stretches back a generation or two or hundreds of years. This is usually based on bloodline. The first and best example of this is the Phantom, but Starman works too.

Hero Worship: Upon a hero's retirement or death, someone takes on the mantle but not necessarily the powers. This might be a sidekick, fan, or just someone borrowing the mystique. Examples include the Flash and Astro City's Confessor.

No Relation: the hero has the same name and approximate powers, but isn't connected to previous or future versions. Where there is a connection, it is a secret for some time. An example is the shift from the golden age Green Lantern to the Green Lantern Corps.

Key aspect of Legacies carry across generations, but style might be different. Looking at four generations of Amazonia, we see:

- all are female heroes,
- all work in the same locale and
- they have either animal-powers, an archery motif, or both.

The *Warrior Woman of the West* was the end of a Legacy hero line; the *Sapphic Scourge of Suffragette City* is Hero Worship, with a direct attempt to emulate the original. The *Contemporary Cultural Costumed Crusader* is a continuation of the Legacy, but also has close ties to the *Altruistic Mother/Atomic Monster,* who on the surface has No Relation.

Legacy heroes have the advantages of history. The character has deep roots in the world, even if this generation is just starting -- a boon for players who like to feel connected. Old allies and enemies are in the wings, and secrets might have been passed along as part of the unusual background. Lineage heroes will be especially in-the-know, which is a nice solution for an experienced player alongside a group of newcomers to the genre or setting.

Amazonia in the Firestorm Effect Universe

One fact of the Firestorm Effect universe is that there is no magic; as an Atomic Horror setting, all its problems are scientific. However, the player requested a "warrior in a magical environment." We ended up threading this needle with the arachnid [shape-shifting aliens](#) that dot the FE timeline: if the Anasazi were born of arachnids in human form it explains the powers, opens the path for animal based superhumans (other terrestrial/arachnoid hybrids).

It also gives Amazonia access to the pocket dimension generated by the Arachnoid ship buried under Painted Sands. The original concepts for the Arachnoid aliens didn't include such a device, but it's a logical enough leap for people who possess "quantum fusion drives" to power their ships. The ship is generating a parallel realm that Amazonia can step into, travel through and store things in.

They are an excuse to design multiple characters, another [outlet](#) for players who overflow with ideas. For players who like switching styles, legacy hero flashbacks are great for stories within stories -- which also show the character concept at various points in the supers continuum. This can be disconcerting for the other players, who might not have a way for their characters to be involved, but there are solutions: old heroes might have worked with the previous generations (it's easy enough to see Omnilad and the third Amazonia having crossed paths at least once); time travel stories might leave the current generation to guard the present while the player picks up the previous incarnation to interact with his temporally altered teammates; or other players could make PCs for the new time frame, giving them a place in the world's history.

Finally, Legacy Heroes are a way to kill a favorite character without losing them. Plots don't have to be abandoned, as they just carry over. For casual players, when the current generation of the Legacy dies, the name on the character sheet can be altered, points reduced and swapped a little, and here comes their daughter/lost sidekick/heir to the curse to keep the story going with minimal interruption.

Let's face it; as a gaming concept, Legacy heroes have a strong pedigree!

Palette *feels* magical, but in truth is still rooted in Atomic Horror. It also links the first, third, and fourth Amazonia via the Arachnoids. The player character (and possibly the player) may never know the real truth about Amazonia's powers and origins, but for practical purposes the character is what was requested. Some players enjoy unraveling these mysteries, and some don't mind being left in the dark, but some really hate the idea of their character's origins being changed. Use this technique with caution!

The Sorcerer's Toolbox

for *GURPS*

by James L. Cambias

Most people are familiar with the basic tools of a fantasy magician: the wand, the staff, the pentagram, the enchanted dagger, and so forth. But any magician worth his pointy hat will have some better equipment in the toolbox. Here are some magical apparatus likely to be found in the laboratory of a practicing magician. Some are ancient, others are high-tech fusions of science and sorcery. They are based on real-world occult books, legends, and crackpot theories.

Blasting Rod

This is a very old type of magical weapon, described in many old books. It is a rod or wand enchanted with a spell which can blast and torment spirits. Magicians typically use them to threaten and control summoned spirits, and as a way to deal with supernatural beings sent against them by rivals.

A Blasting Rod is enchanted with the Spirit Lightning spell -- a variant of the spell Lightning (see page 196 of **GURPS Magic**), tuned to affect spirits only. The spell does 1d-1 damage to spirits only (even intangible ones) per energy point expended by the caster. Blasting Rods are seldom self-powered. Rods are typically enchanted to skill level 20. They cost $27,000 in a fantasy setting, $50,000 or more in a world where magic is not commonly known.

Crookes Disruptor

Invented by the English physicist Sir William Crookes, working in partnership with the medium Daniel Douglas Home in 1870, the Crookes Disruptor is a proton emitter tuned specifically to affect immaterial spirits. (Essentially a Disruptor is a technological equivalent of a Blasting Rod.) Early versions were large, power-hungry, and extremely malfunction-prone. Today, a century of improvement has made Crookes Disruptors portable, reliable, and quite effective. All Disruptors emit particle beams which can damage spirits, but are harmless to material beings. They are entirely legal in societies where magic is unknown, because in such places the authorities view Disruptors as harmless crackpot tech. In a magical setting they are likely LC 3.

TL5^ Crookes Disruptor

This is the original design. It is a large vacuum tube surrounded by focusing coils, which emits a 100-kilojoule charged particle beam. The device is large, bulky, and fragile: it has a malfunction number of 16. There is a tripod so that the user doesn't have to wrestle with it. It requires a 100 kilowatt power supply (usually in the form of a cable to a dedicated generator or a power main).

TL8^ Crookes Disruptor

This is the result of considerable refinement by later engineers making use of considerably better technology. Output is 90 kilojoules but damage is greater. The weapon is quite light, only 1 lb. without batteries, but the 3600-kilojoule energy pack increases the weight to 4 lbs.

TL	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	Weight	RoF	Shots	ST	Bulk	Rcl	Cost	LC	Notes
5^	Crookes Tube	3d	6	40/80	45	1/2	--	16T -9	--	$1,000	4	1,2
8^	Disruptor	4d	8	40/80	4/3	2	20	6 -4	1	$24,000	4	1

1 Damage only affects immaterial spirits.
2 Requires tripod and external power source.

Faerie Drops

These eyedrops have been used for centuries by the Faerie to give changeling children and occasional favored mortals the ability to see into the spirit world. The secret was stolen in the early 19th Century by an Irish physician called in to attend at a Faerie woman's difficult childbirth. He stole a sample and analyzed it, and was able to mail his findings to a colleague before being harried to death by the Wild Hunt. Alchemists working together with Faerie specialists and magicians were able to duplicate and improve the formula. The drops give the See Invisible (Faerie Glamour) advantage for up to 1 hour per dose. Cost is $1,000 for a bottle of 5 doses. (Since it doesn't require a magician to produce, the cost is the same in mundane and magical settings.)

Scrying Mirror

Mirrors as tools for scrying and divination date back to the ancient Etruscans. Beginning in Renaissance-era Venice, mages and alchemists have tried to improve the qualities of scrying mirrors, by using mystically vsignificant materials, unusual curvature of the reflecting surface, and other techniques. The best-quality mirrors were those made during the 1860s by the Italian-Armenian mystic Cuilna Vilmara. A mystic scrying mirror can give the magus a skill bonus of +1 to +3 when performing Divination by Crystal-Gazing. A +1 mirror costs about $8,000; +2 is $33,000; and a +3 mirror costs $165,000. (Double the price in a low-magic or secret magic campaign.) If you are using the Hermetic modifiers from *GURPS Cabal,* a enchanted mirror also gives its skill bonus for any spell associated with the Moon or the decan Iudal.

Spirit Lenses

Spirit lenses are made of specially alchemically-doped crystal, polarized and tinted to allow anyone looking through the lens to see spirits. Essentially a spirit lens gives the user the Detect (Spirits) advantage with the Precise enhancement. They are very useful but hard to make. Spirit lenses first became available in the 18th century, and do not get any benefit from improved technology. A spirit lens 1 inch across (suitable for use as a monocle or in a camera attachment) costs $1,000 in modern money. A matched pair of lenses (for use in goggles or glasses -- it is impossible to have one ordinary glass and one spirit lens in a pair of glasses) cost $2,500. Spirit contact lenses are extremely expensive and must be custom-fitted to the wearer, costing $5,000. They cannot be combined with ordinary corrective optics. Cost is unchanged by the campaign magic level.

Spirit Trap

Although designs for electrical spirit traps go back to the 1850s, they only became practical with the discovery of superconductors in the 1960s. Spirit traps use flows of electrical current along carefully-aligned channels to create a cone of force which attracts and then imprisons spirit beings. The effect is that of the spell Entrap Spirit. Note that a spirit trap must have a constant supply of power to maintain its containment field. Even a split-second flicker is enough to let the occupants get free. Constructing a spirit trap requires both Gadgeteering and Magery.

Tesla Spirit Trap (TL5^)

This is a box about the size of a telephone booth, surrounded by coils and magnets. When operating, its surface is covered with arcing bolts of electricity, and it is surrounded by a corona of blue plasma discharge. It can hold spirits with a combined ST and IQ of up to 20. It weighs 200 lbs. and requires a 2-kilowatt power supply (typically from a dedicated generator or a bank of batteries). Cost is $10,000 in 1927.

ECU-13 (TL8^)

This model is a folding plastic and aluminum framework creating a cube 2 yards on a side. It is powered by house current, drawing 400 watts, and can hold spirits with a total ST and IQ of 40. Weight is 50 lbs. Cost is $25,000. Multiple ECUs can be connected to hold physically bulky spirits, or to create a space which spirits cannot enter.

Pyramid Review

Venus Needs Men!

Published by Synelix Games

Created by John L. Velonis, artwork by Jeff Durham

20" by 20" playing board, 76 cards, 125 population chips, 30 spaceships, three 10-sided dice, rules sheet; $29.95 (USD)

"March, 1954: atomic tests by witless humans have destroyed the alien artifact which protected humanity from its hostile neighbors. Now, the races of the solar system are descending upon the Earth in droves. Their mission -- harvest humanity for their own needs. And with the destruction of the alien artifact, the only things that stand in their way are . . . each other!"

This is the setup for *Venus Needs Men!:* a strategic board game for two to six players that plays like someone watched too many grade-D flying saucer movies from the 1950's and turned them all into a game, with fun and hilarious results. While there are a few questions of power balance between the planets -- most notably Pluto and Earth -- my test-drives reveal the game to be challenging, amusing and very enjoyable.

The main goal of the game is to harvest (or save, in Earth's case) a majority of the Earth's population. Players can take on the role of Mars, Venus, Titan, Ganymede, Pluto, or Earth, each of whom have special abilities, as well as certain advantages and disadvantages. For example, Mars can use Mind Control to take over opposing players' ships, and use a Magneto Blaster to attack ships, pull them closer or push them away. Meanwhile, Venus can gather two population counters per ship per turn instead of one, but must use unstable "Q-Rays" to attack with, running the risk of losing their own ship, or being teleported elsewhere, in the battle.

During a planet's turn, players can choose to build more ships, move their ships, roll to attack opposing players' ships, research a Technical Upgrade, or use ships landed on Earth (or in orbit, if you're Pluto) to harvest population counters. What keeps this from being a simple "move, shoot, and grab" scenario is that players can perform only *one* of these actions per turn: some or all ships can move, or some or all ships can shoot, but some can't shoot while others move or perform other actions. Victory depends on thinking ahead, exploiting others' weaknesses with your advantages (and other players) and being very, very careful with your ships.

One possible key to victory -- especially for poor, beleaguered Earth -- is using the Technical Upgrade cards. Players can opt to perform a Research Action for their turn, which involves picking one of the three upturned Technical Upgrade cards, and rolling to see if their planet can learn the technology each card offers: possibly gaining better shields, weapons, movement, ship building or population gathering techniques. Research Actions are a risk, since you might effectively waste a turn by not rolling well enough to get one, but they can really pay off.

Another, more straightforward route to winning is the careful use of Zap Cards: fun strategy cards that aid and enliven play. They can be used to give or take away turns, blow up other player's ships, stop all players from performing certain actions, force other players to take actions, or affect the outcome of die rolls. Many can be played at any time as an interrupt, and some have to be played at specific times, such as when it's another player's turn, or when someone else plays another Zap Card. They can also be sacrificed to gain extra actions (another movement if you move, another ship if you build, and so on). Players start with an equal number of Zap Cards, but they can only have the top three cards in their hand at any time, and replace them from the top of the deck when they're used. So no one knows exactly what cards they have in reserve, and once their deck is used and discarded, they can't get any more.

One of the best things about the game, besides its play, is that it's very user-friendly. Not only are the special abilities and technical strengths of each player printed on separate, Special cards for easy reference, but there are also sets of reference cards that summarize the order and rules of play, give every planet's attack and defense scores and summarize their special abilities -- enough for each player. The Technical Upgrade cards all say what they duplicate, make obsolete, or are cumulative with. Also, the Zap Cards are all individually numbered, so that if there's ever a question of one card trumping the effects of another, the one with the higher number wins out, saving a lot of arguments.

(And if you have a question that can't be answered, the game's [website](#) has both an errata and a FAQ, as well as a forum to post questions no one's asked yet.)

Another nice feature is that you have a choice between playing a Basic Game or the Enhanced Game. In the Basic Game, the only special abilities are that some aliens start out with more ships than others, and can build more per turn, to make up for their planets being further away from Earth. Putting almost everyone on an even level makes for a faster game that still preserves the strategy and flavor of the normal, "Enhanced" option. There are also rules for adjusting Earth's population to allow for shorter or longer games, complete with adjusted goals to win for two to six players.

The only real problem with *Venus Needs Men!* is one of power balance. While most of the planets seem to be evened out fairly well, the deck is decidedly stacked against poor Earth. Its combat stats are the weakest, it starts out with no spaceships in either game, and it can't start moving people to the refuge until someone else attacks earth's spaceships or collects population. And even if people are in the refuge, they can still be attacked and harvested from orbit or land by aliens -- a severe disadvantage. They do get a free Research Action every time an alien spacecraft is destroyed in orbit or on land, yes, but I'm not convinced that ability truly makes up for these drawbacks.

Meanwhile, Pluto has too many advantages. They can teleport randomly and zap population from orbit, they get three dice to attack with, their ships take two hits to destroy, they're immune to Martian mind control . . . *and* they get to go first!

(If I was rewriting the game, I'd take away Pluto's teleportation abilities, let Earth start with two spaceships and let them start collecting population from the start, as though they had impending warning of alien attack. Give it a try and see what you think.)

Another quibble -- this one minor -- is that the cards all have the same art on the back. They are labeled on the upper left front corner, but it would be nice if the different kinds of cards had something other than the *Venus Needs Men!* logo, as this would make pre and post-game sorting a little faster.

That said, in the aftermath of several invasions, I find *Venus Needs Men!* to be intricate enough to be challenging without being too mind-numbingly complicated, and presented well enough to foil most headaches over the rules. While I'm concerned about the power imbalances, they don't kill the experience for me. So I'm still giving the game a good recommendation for strategic board game fans who like something fast-paced, fun and funny.

As of this writing the only way to get a copy is to order it from Synelix Games at [their website](#) -- I recommend preparing for invasion today!

--J. Edward Tremlett

Pyramid Review

Out in the Black (for the [Serenity Roleplaying Game](#))

Published by [Margaret Weis Productions](#)

Written & Designed by Tracy Hickman & Laura Hickman

Illustrated by Lindsay Archer, Dan Bryce, Larry Elmore, Tracy Hickman, & Ryan Wolfe

Cover by 11TH HOUR

104-page b&w softcover; $24.99

So 12 months in and we finally get some proper support for the ***Serenity Roleplaying Game.*** And even more amazingly, this support actually comes with an index (even if only a character index) and a character sheet, both of which the core rule book singularly lacked, along with several other elements.

To be fair, licenses are not always the easiest of things to handle for a games publisher. Nevertheless, it has been a long wait for *Out in the Black,* the first proper support and the first scenario for the game. In the meantime, several *Traveller* scenarios have appeared that could easily be run in the *Firefly* 'Verse. All they needed was a little western-afying. Plus all of them were cheap.

Out in the Black is not only of note -- important being too big a word to use here -- because it is the first scenario and supplement for the *Serenity Roleplaying Game,* but because it is co-written by Tracy Hickman and Laura Hickman, who happen to have a number of classic ***Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*** scenarios to their names, including ***I6 Ravenloft, DL1 Dragons of Despair,*** and the ***I3-5 Desert of Desolation*** series. The question is, can ***Out in the Black*** be as good as those scenarios were in their own way?

At the heart of the scenario are two things: a mystery and a McGuffin, the treasury of the Independents, reputedly lost in the final days of the Unification War. What it is, and where it is, has become a matter of rumor, scuttlebutt, and all manner of conspiracy theory. There are parties who do know where it resides and will do almost anything to get it back, including lie, cheat, and steal. At the head of the queue is a certain green-eyed, red-headed lass, whose name today could be Brigit, Elizabeth, Yolanda, or even Mrs. Malcolm Reynolds. And if her plans just happen to involve the PCs, then that is too bad for them.

The scenario takes place on Regina, the same world as the *Firefly* episode "The Train Heist." More specifically in Frisco, a town dominated by the Hornsilver Mine. Currently the town is under Alliance blockade at the bequest of the Corone Mining Consortium who want in and control. The blockade means no fuel to power the mine's generators and that is only available in frozen form from a nearby comet. Making a delivery is how the player characters or crew get involved.

Once there, the crew quickly become involved in the town's affairs, from kidnapping Frisco's leading figure to take him to a better shindig and standing in for an electric sideshow to the obligatory brawl and helping with a Miners' Union election. Getting involved with these events gains the crew favor with the town's factions -- the townsfolk, the miners, the mine owners, and the local Tongs. Gaining enough favor triggers events that further advance the scenario's storyline.

Divided into four acts, ***Out in the Black*** starts out in clever fashion by drawing upon Crew member's assets (advantages) and Complications (disadvantages) as the trigger for a flashback. It is a device well used in the television series, here taking the characters back to the original appearance of the mcguffin as well as to encounters with those whose lives it has touched. The five flashback scenes should be enough to involve at least one or more members of the crew. Each encounter or situation is pleasingly laid out in fashion that makes it easy to run.

In addition to the adventure, the town of Frisco and its inhabitants are all fully detailed, providing enough information for the GM to have the crew revisit or to help him model further settlements (though the ***[Knuckleduster Cow Town Creator](#)*** would also be helpful). There are also rules for the real card game of the Wild West, *Faro* and a surprisingly technical description of mines in general. In addition, footnotes link elements of the scenario back to ETW or Earth That Was, much of it actually based upon both the real history and tales of that history as told to Tracy Hickman by his family.

Physically ***Out in the Black*** is reasonably put together, and illustrated with a few pieces of decent art. The maps are well done, but clearly should have been in color as some clarity is lost in black and white. In terms of organization, it seems curious to have the sideshow events that gain the crew faction points in the section detailing Frisco. Why not have them in the adventure section where they obviously belong?

There is one final problem with ***Out in the Black.*** The adventure is written for use with Heroic Level characters, created by the players rather than the actual crew of the *Serenity.* And if the players do take the roles of Captain Reynolds et. al., what happens when they run into "Brigit" given the history they have with her? The GM advice admits that the possibility is a volatile mix, but does not offer any help. To be blunt, any player is going to take one look at her and walk the other way, knowing that she is trouble. The authors should have either recommended that the adventure as unsuitable for use with the *Serenity* crew or given some actual guidance, and certainly not left the GM hanging in the wind.

Certainly, though, ***Out in the Black*** is a busy affair that gives the crew plenty to do. Gun fights, bar room brawls, piloting a ship onto a comet, hire a Sheriff, deal with said plumb loco Sheriff, run around in a mine, and even wear a big frilly dress. Overall ***Out in the Black*** is more than a fitting tale to tell in the 'Verse with material enough for two to three episodes. It is the solid type of support that the game deserves and should have received in 2005.

--Matthew Pook

Thanks for the Road Trip

This week I'm writing this from the abode of the in-laws, about whom I cannot say enough nice things (and not just because they might read the screen while I go to tend the Child of Healthy Lungs). We got here via means of a six-hour road trip from Indianapolis to the outskirts of Rockford, Michigan which people around here note is outside of Greenville; Greenville, for its part, is pinpointed for nonlocals by noting that it's outside of Grand Rapids. Grand Rapids, childhood home of President Ford, is noteworthy to outsiders for belonging to the side of the state that isn't Detroit. Which is to say, beyond this point we start getting into landmarks that begin, "Do you know that planet next to Mars?"

Which is to say that we're a bit off the beaten path here.

We made the journey here via a more back route means, under the theory that being with a Child of Healthy Lungs in the middle of the Interstate when he decides that now is a good time to try a round of live-action Teething: The Hollering. So instead of traveling from rest stop to rest stop in 20-mile increments, we traveled from small town to small town in 20-mile increments, passing places with evocative names like "Restaurant" and "Closed." There's a certain sense of despair when you pass a billboard that says "10 minutes to McDonald's" and you realize that this means there's absolutely nothing of note before that point, and at that point there's . . . well, a McDonald's.

Fortunately, the Child of Healthy Lungs succumbed to the siren's song of the comfy warm vibrating car, so he really only woke up once when we needed to change his diaper (at a McDonald's) and he decided to ensure that his vocal abilities still worked by demonstrating a capacity for audibility usually reserved for Ewok widows beaten with baseball bats.

So even though we budgeted 10 hours for our five-hour trip, we made it in much less time. Now, the cynical among you might believe that the preceding pointless and eventless anecdote is merely a means of fulfilling my contractually obligated word count for a Thanksgiving column, but you'd be no more than 40% correct. (The cynical would be completely correct about believing such about the previous sentence. And that last one. Err . . . and that last one. Dang.)

Anyway, I'm about to tie it into gaming in mere sentences, as soon as I point out a complaint I read about recently the *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* computer RPG.[1] It pointed out that the game was pretty enjoyable, except -- once an area has been cleared -- any backtracking or traveling is really boring. Many computer RPGs have this problem; in any game which involves trekking around, there are often points where Point A sends you to Point B (where you smite every problem along the way), get the chocolaty Whatchamacallit, and return to Point A . . . which, since everything was smitten earlier, means that leg of the journey is pretty boring.

Some computer RPGs resolve this problem in various ways. For example, many introduce rapid travel techniques (moongates, flying cuckoo birds, or what have you). Others merely allow a menu-choice option to go to a place you've already cleared (adding the appropriate amount of time in-game, but making the real-world part zip by).

While real RPGs can emulate either of these aspects, they (ironically) introduce another problem in so doing. For games that feature rapid travel abilities (especially of the "time passes, and you're in Paris" sort), it's very difficult to introduce new elements, information, or encounters along the way; if the GM does, it's immediately obvious that there's more going on here than a random encounter. If the heroes go from Foobar to Barfoo (taking care of any problems along the way), then if the players are expecting to just pop back in Foobar afterwords but the GM says, "Along the way you encounter a merchant . . ." then it's pretty glaring that this won't be some random dude.

Of course, I've encountered this before in my own games. While I might return to the idea of "instant transportation" or "rapid movement" in another column (because they're too meaty to take up the rest of this column), I thought I'd offer up some tips for how you might minimize this problem yourself.

First, I'm a big believer of the "no encounter is random" school. Classic *Dungeons & Dragons* notwithstanding, I feel

each encounter/battle/retreat should serve to advance the plot, characterization (for PCs or NPCs), or background. Now, each encounter doesn't need to be of paramount importance, and there's a lot of wiggle room in the "characterization/background" departments. But, in general, if the heroes encounter a dozen orcs wandering in the wilds, then there's a darn good reason for them to be hanging out (and a reason for the PCs to encounter them).

So, once the players realize that there aren't any random encounters, the question shifts in their mind from "Will this be an important encounter?" to "*How* will this be an important encounter?"

And it's that "how" where everything hinges. Because, obviously, not every encounter should be an attack, nor does every encounter need to advance the plot. Even those that do don't need to do so obviously or directly. So let's return to our "merchant on the way back to Foobar" example from above.

This merchant could be the proverbial polymorphed pit fiend prepared to pounce on passing PCs (although this should hopefully only happen if it's important to the story, such as he's a lieutenant of a major player, he's trying to stop the heroes, or so on). But what if it's really:

- A chance to advance the plot directly. The merchant has heard a rumor of strange brewings in Farbü, and wants the heroes to help.
- A chance to advance the plot indirectly. The merchant has heard a rumor of strange brewings in Farbü, and wants to see if there are any economic opportunities for him.
- A chance to introduce more background information. The merchant is on his way to Farbü, and is trying to steel himself to Farbüvians odd customs of speaking in a singsong voice and refraining from all activity for two hours a day.
- A chance for a romantic encounter (promoting characterization). The merchant takes a liking to one of the heroes, and proceeds to bust a move.
- A chance for a comedic encounter (promoting characterization). The merchant -- having heard of the heroes' exploits in Barfoo -- hopes to get the PCs' endorsements for his wares.

And so on. Note that *most* of these are "unimportant," in terms of a life-or-death struggle, but they are all "important" on some level. In this way, the players don't embrace a "shields up, red alert" mentality for every encounter, and the game can still advance quickly from place to place without needing to bog down in meaningless random encounters.

Because there's nothing worse than being two hours into a six-hour trip to Foobar, and seeing that "McDonald's in 10 Minutes" billboard.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

[1] Actually, as I was typing this, I realized I wasn't sure what I should call the ***Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*** game. After all, it existed for both Windows and Xbox, so calling it either a "video game RPG" or a "computer RPG" doesn't seem quite right. And merely calling it an "RPG" -- as those in the electronic entertainment biz are wont to do -- would no doubt confuse those of you looking for info on real RPGs.

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

Gene Genies: Alternate Bio-Techs

"Biotechnology cannot occur without a world and the people who inhabit it. It is easiest to think of biotech in a near or far future setting, but this does not have to limit the tech levels or types of worlds in which it can play a role."
-- David Morgan-Mar and David Pulver, ***GURPS Bio-Tech***

Well, ***GURPS Bio-Tech*** is here, and it's like a giant syringe of Captain America super-serum for any campaign you might imagine. But for campaigns that I might imagine, it's downright necessary. Because the three campaigns I imagine here are tributes to the two Davids and their mighty, mighty word plasm. So set up your setting centrifuge, and get ready for some chrono-chromosomal craziness of the most uplifting sort. You'll have a blastocyst.

"Here the grafter pays his vows with apple garlands, when the unwilling pear stock has borne fruit.
Be silent empty rumour: there's another pointer to my name: but believe the god who speaks about himself.
My nature is adaptable to every form: turn me into whatever you wish: I'll be noble.
Clothe me in Coan silk, I'll be no bad girl: and when I wear the toga who'll say I am no man?"
-- Propertius, "Elegy of the God Vertumnus," *Elegies* IV.2

In the wide, marshy part of the Tiber, the Romans found something underground. They weren't even Romans yet, technically -- it was two generations before Romulus. But they found it, and named it "Vertumnus," blending their word *vertere* (to change, as in "revert") and the chthonic god of the Etruscans, Voltumnus. It became the god of grafting plants, and of disguises. When they took it out of the ground, the ground solidified, and the Tiber flowed free, and Rome could be built. They set it up over the Forum, and every August they exposed their first fruits to it. And they ate those fruits and grew strong, and overthrew the Etruscans who foolishly kept their Voltumnus buried underground. And they expanded their film of empire across Italy. And their grain could grow in winter (as long as they shared seed with Vertumnus) and their fruits could grant men dark-vision and armor-skin (as long as they grew from Vertumnus' grafted stock), and their soldiers could join together in an unstoppable mass, a Legion to crush Rome's enemies (as long as their fathers and mothers drank from Vertumnus' fountain). The Legion has come to the East now, where the Jews call it *shaggath,* "the fornication," but they are merely fearful of Vertumnus' bounty, and jealous that its seed has made Rome truly a land of milk and honey.

This ***Imperial Rome-Bio-Tech*** campaign frame has perhaps more than a little bit of horror to it, but it's all in the way you present it. To the Carthaginians, Greeks, and Jews, the power of Vertumnus is a rapacious and demonic evil. To players of Roman PCs, Vertumnus is just a way to explain supersoldiers, biomods, rapid healing, gengineered plants and animals, and a whole raft of TL(2+n) magitech. (To tedious real historians, Vertumnus is just an obscure cultivation god, and the first eight sentences of this campaign frame are essentially accurate, if highly colored.) Whether Vertumnus is a leftover shoggoth from a crinoid outpost in upper Gondwanaland or an alien hive sponge or just a handy blob of wet nanoviruses surviving in a crashed UFO is up to the GM. What matters is that the Romans have a monopoly on Vertumnus, and that Vertumnus is "adaptable to any form," as Propertius reminds us.

"Legend has it that this mermaid appeared to Prince Shotoku as he was passing along the shores of Lake Biwa . . . The mermaid claimed that over many years it had come to a clear understanding of the horrors of destroying life, and that it was prepared to move on to the next world. As a final wish before dying, though, it asked the prince to establish a temple using the mermaid's body as a centerpiece, where it could be used to educate people . . ."
-- "Edo," "Mermaid Mummies" on pinktentacle.com

Whether Prince Shotoku actually built the Mermaid Temple in Shigu prefecture or not, by the Heian era, the monks had begun to use the mermaid body to educate people. Rather than destroy life, they would create it. They used the finest miniature metal tools made by Japan's greatest steelsmiths to cut the mermaid open, and saved the living roe inside. These, they learned slowly to implant into fish, and later into slave girls. They created special algae and kelp to produce humors essential to proper cultivation of these homunculi, and learned to exactly duplicate their most successful stock. The Mermaid Temple flourished in good times and suffered in bad with the rest of Nihon, but the breeding line continued. What, exactly, they accomplished may never be known. The shoguns who hated Buddhism, and imperial myths, and independent monasteries arose and burned the Mermaid Temple and scattered its monks. A

century or two passed. And then the saying began to circulate: "If you would live forever, eat mermaid flesh." And the *misemono* began to come to Edo, traveling shows featuring amazing feats of human acrobatics and strength. And in some *misemono* tents, you could see a mermaid, and when you left you would have good fortune and health. Even the more daring aristocracy began to keep mermaids in gardens and pools, idle curiosities and playthings for the rich and bored.

And the Tokugawa had forgotten the danger, but the mermaids had forgotten nothing. By now, they had seduced their guardians and creators, who had perhaps begun to yield to their own aesthetics in design and cultivation. (Also, with the Temple destroyed, the human seeds for more mermaids had to come from somewhere.) In 1867, the Mermaid Society declared the ascension of the Empress Sachiko, "Daughter of the Sun and Ocean." The Tokugawa, cut off from the modern world and outclassed in combat by the Mermaids' acrobatic *kappajin,* collapsed immediately. The Sachiko reign has lasted ever since then. The mermaids are everywhere, and their monks now turn their tools and cultivars on their fellow men. "Japan," Ambassador Warren said undiplomatically a while back, "is becoming a giant fish farm, where the people are the fish." A remark which gets fewer laughs now, in the 74th year of the Sachiko reign, 1941.

This **GURPS Japan-Bio-Tech-WWII** campaign frame is a straightforward contest of a truly alien culture created in the hothouse world of Heian Japan and the brawling diesel ethos of FDR's America. PCs might be American, Japanese (human, parahuman, or mermaid) or a fragile chimera of all. It can trend toward pulp, with OSS men dueling with gengineered samebito and kappa; toward horror (was that first mermaid perhaps a Deep One?); toward agonized anime-style cultural angst, as lovers are torn apart by inevitable war. It can be an examination of tolerance of (or within) a transhuman culture, or a pure war story of humans outclassed by a Frankenstein tyranny. It's a regular sashimi platter of possibilities, in other words.

"The primate station in Sukhum -- in retrospect, the real and lasting accomplishment of Ivanov's African expedition -- operated throughout the rest of the Soviet period and even greatly expanded after World War II . . . Since 1932 the station became part of the Institute of Experimental Medicine, and from then on, research focused on various biomedical topics and on Pavlovian studies of higher nervous activity. Later, some experiments were done there in connection with the Soviet atomic and space programs. . . . Unfortunately, the station did not survive in post-Soviet times, when Sukhum -- the capital of the self-proclaimed Abkhaz Republic -- became in 1992 the scene of severe fighting between the Georgian and Abkhazian paramilitaries."
-- Kirill Rossiianov, "Beyond Species: Il'ya Ivanov and His Experiments on Cross-Breeding Humans with Anthropoid Apes," *Science in Context* (2002) 15: 277-316

It's not widely known that as early as 1900 German biologists were speculating about the viability of ape-human hybrids. Hans Friedenthal got the idea from the similarities of ape and human blood sera. Elie Metchnikoff, the head of the Institut Pasteur, used those data to test apes' susceptibility to syphilis, and sponsored a Dutch zoologist, Hermann Moens, who projected a trip to Africa to inseminate humans with ape sperm. Ernest Haeckel, Darwin's successor, praised it in 1908. The Prussian Academy of Sciences established a pilot project in the Canary Islands in 1912 to teach chimpanzees German and to raise them as human children; the sexologist Hermann Rohleder planned his own "humanzee" project. And as Ilya Ivanov arrived in French Guinea in 1926 to breed "chumans" for Stalin, the pioneer ape researcher in America, Robert Yerkes, was supposedly breeding humanzees in a secret lab in Florida. All of this can be found with enough digging.

What can't be found is the truth. That the projects succeeded. That ape-human hybrids were successful. Wildly successful. They became the secret front in WWI, as the Institut Pasteur and the Yerkes National Primate Research Center worked to breed and train humanzees to counter the Prussian chumans churned out by the farms in the Canaries and Cameroon. Ivanov wasn't purged for his embarrassing experiments, he was purged for publicizing them -- and for "joining a counter-revolutionary movement." Stalin feared the apes of Sukhumi, but turned them over to the Pavlov Institute in 1932. Mengele reproduced the research of Haeckel and Rohleder; the old Ivanov humanzees came out of the cold and were sacrificed by the NKVD. The Yerkes chumans, reinforced by the Abuela ape farm in Cuba, joined the OSS, but couldn't keep Mengele from fleeing to Brazil with his research. Again, Sukhumi raised the bar -- Soviet chumans proved amazingly susceptible to somatic mutation. Wild stories spread in the Western spy networks, of Soviet psychic chumans who could start fires or turn invisible. Then the Russians took Cuba, and they took the Abuela farm,

and with it the Yerkes research. Mengele offered to turn over his papers to the CIA in exchange for immunity -- was the deal taken? Well, we won the Cold War, and Mengele died on the beach. And in 1992, the Soviet chuman labs in Sukhumi fell into a war zone, right on the fault line of Chechen and al-Qaida terrorism in the Caucasus.

This is a gritty, modern-day *GURPS Special Ops-Espionage-Bio-Tech* campaign frame with an appallingly silly premise. You can go all the way to the hard core edge, surgically grafting your tongue in cheek and probably making the PCs be chuman mercenaries, special ops or other shadow denizens. (Use the templates for uplifted chimpanzees from *GURPS Uplift,* or build your own from *Bio-Tech* allowing plenty of variations.) They try to carve out a place in a society that can't admit they exist in between deadly and deniable missions -- a distillation of the stresses and ethical questions of the "wetwork" and mercenary specialists in real life. Their "ape blood" represents the bestial, killing side of global politics that postmodern Western civilization would prefer not to think about. Or, of course, you can go almost all the way over to the other side, with *Lancelot Link* jokes aplenty. In that game, humanzee PCs are more likely on the run both from panicked human governments and evil chumans allied with terrorists or megalomaniacal Brazilian banana magnates. I don't recommend mixing the two flavors -- it would be chimerical, at best.

Those Who Pray

Medieval Clerics in *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Brett Pasinella

Medieval people envisioned their society as divided into those who work, those who fight, and those who pray. Clerics in medieval society played a much greater role than simple prayer; they were scholars, teachers, lawyers, physicians, statesmen, architects, scientists, and musicians. Before the plagues, wars, and inquisitions of the late Middle Ages, the clergy helped unite and strengthen the otherwise disparate feudal states of western Europe.

This article presents a set of guidelines for creating medieval European clerics in *GURPS Fourth Edition.* These characters could play important roles in a historical setting such as *GURPS Middle Ages* or *GURPS Vikings,* a medieval-influenced Fantasy setting (such as Yrth), or one of the many echoes or alternate Earths of *GURPS Infinite Worlds.*

Building a Clerical Character

The medieval landscape was populated by a bewildering variety of religious people -- anchoresses, brother-sergeants, canons regular, canons secular, nuns' priests, and cardinal deacons, just to name a few. Detailing every possible type of cleric is far beyond the scope of this article; however, a set of common characteristics can be defined. By mixing and matching the options presented below, GMs and players should be able to reproduce almost any instance from history or fiction.

Clerk or Lay: Clerical Investment and a New Special Limitation

The fundamental aspect separating clerics from laymen is the Clerical Investment advantage; it is required for any clerical character and is a prerequisite for Religious Rank (see below). It set the clergy apart from the world, allowed them to live by different laws, but also placed additional responsibilities upon them.

A member of the clergy was said to be ordained in holy orders. There were seven orders, divided into four minor and three major orders (two other orders are also sometimes included, bringing the total to nine). The minor orders from lowest to highest were janitor (doorkeeper), lector (reader), exorcist, and acolyte. The three major orders were subdeacon, deacon, and priest. Additionally, tonsured clerks -- who were members of the clergy but had not taken any other orders (e.g., a university student, or a simple scribe) -- were sometimes described as a minor order below janitor. Bishop was also sometimes said to be a major order above priest.

Women were barred from taking holy orders (nuns were essentially equivalent to tonsured clerks). Churchmen in minor orders were free to marry, while those in major orders were usually required to take a vow of celibacy (see Vow below). The sacred vessels used in rituals could only be handled by someone in major orders. Only a priest could administer a sacrament such as matrimony, eucharist (mass), or penance. The powers to consecrate a new church, to ordain clerics, and to confirm lay members of the church were reserved for a bishop.

In the Middle Ages, being a priest was not a prerequisite for a successful career in the church, and many people -- including women, for whom ordination was not an option -- rose to prominent positions without being ordained (see Order and Office below).

GURPS, by default, uses a fairly abstract representation of ordination; usually reserving Clerical Investment for ordained priests and/or limiting monks and nuns to low levels of Religious Rank (see *GURPS Fantasy* Designer's Notes, and *GURPS Banestorm* for examples). This poses two problems from a historical point of view; first, since Clerical Investment is a prerequisite for Religious Rank, it makes it difficult create high ranking clerics who are not

ordained, such as an abbess or an archdeacon (see Religious Rank below), and second it prevents monks and nuns from receiving the +1 reaction bonus from coreligionists granted by Clerical Investment. On the other hand, Clerical Investment also includes the ability to officiate at religious ceremonies -- a capacity that unordained clerics did not possess. GMs looking for a more detailed treatment of ordination may wish to utilize the following new special limitation for Clerical Investment to represent clerics who are not priests:

Not ordained: You are a member of the clergy and receive the social benefits as such; however, you cannot preside over ceremonies as an ordained priest. You may purchase additional levels of Religious Rank, but you may be barred from certain ranks or positions in your church at the GM's discretion. In a campaign with functioning mystical abilities (see Prayer and Scared Places in *GURPS Fantasy*), the GM should decide if you gain the same abilities and bonuses as someone with the unlimited form of Clerical Investment. -40%.

Churchmen who can administer sacraments -- i.e., priests and bishops -- should take the full 5-point version of Clerical Investment. All other clerics should take the limited version.

This optional rule is used in the new meta-traits and templates that follow. Gamers who wish to use the simpler method should increase the cost of the packages by 2 CP.

Secular or Regular: New Meta-Traits

These collections of advantages and disadvantages are common to all official members of the church. They can be useful in creating a variety of religious characters, and can be listed as a single trait to save space on a character sheet.

Clerical Meta-Traits
Variable

The medieval clergy was divided into two bodies. Clerics who saw to the spiritual needs of laymen or to the mundane administration of the church were called secular clergy. Clerics who lived according to a monastic rule, such as the Rule of St. Benedict, were called regular clergy (after regulus, the Latin word for rule). They lived apart from the ordinary day-to-day world and dedicated themselves to prayer, work, and study. The monastic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience were characteristic of regular clergy.

Secular Cleric: You are a cleric whose responsibilities include seeing to the spiritual needs of your followers or administering the day-to-day operation of your church. Clerical Investment (Not Ordained, -40%) [3]; Legal Immunity [5]; Patron (the church; multinational organization; Minimal Intervention, -50%; appears 6 or less) [8]; and Distinctive Feature (tonsure) [-1]. *15 points.*

Regular Cleric: You are a cleric who lives apart from the world, devoted to prayer and study. Claim to Hospitality (members of your order) [10]; Clerical Investment (Not Ordained, -40%) [3]; Legal Immunity [5]; Patron (the church; multinational organization; Minimal Intervention, -50%; appears 6 or less) [8]; Social Regard (Respected) [5]; Discipline of Faith (Monasticism) [-10]; Duty (Church; Nonhazardous; occurs 12 or less) [-5]; Vow (chastity) [-5]; and Distinctive Feature (tonsure) [-1]. *10 points.*

Ordained priests will have to pay an additional 2 points to raise Clerical Investment to the unlimited version. Record this as an "omitted racial trait" -- Clerical Investment (Ordained) [2] -- on their character sheet (see page 262 of the *Basic Set*).

Order and Office: Religious Rank

Holy orders (see Clerical Investment, above) represented spiritual initiation into the mysteries of the church. Office, on the other hand, was an administrative function that the cleric performed within the church hierarchy, essentially his "day job."

There is some degree of overlap between office and order, making it confusing to separate them. For example, the minor orders are also equivalent to an office (as their name implies). However, order and office are separate since most offices did not require the holder to be a priest.

Office is modeled with the Religious Rank advantage. Secular and regular clergy use a different system of ranks up to Rank 5. Above Rank 5, the offices have authority over both types of clerics. The ranks are outlined below.

Rank	Secular	Regular
0	clerk	novice
1	minor orders	junior monk/nun/canon/canoness
2	subdeacon/deacon	senior monk/nun/canon/canoness
3	priest/secular canon	obedientiary (e.g., cellarer, librarian, etc.)
4	dean	prior/prioress
5	archdeacon	abbot/abbess
6		bishop
7		archbishop
8		pope

The offices of dean, obedientiary, and prior were traditionally held by ordained priests. Being a priest was a prerequisite for Ranks above 5, and abbot.

Other Advantages and Disadvantages

Administrative Rank

Since the church had a monopoly on education, it was very common for government officials to be churchmen. Characters who hold a position in the royal bureaucracy should take Administrative Rank.

GMs should allow PCs to transfer points between Administrative and Religious Rank, or to hold both types of Rank simultaneously. It was not uncommon for a high-ranking royal official, but mere clerk (Religious Rank 0), to be appointed to a bishopric by the king (much to the annoyance of higher-ranking churchmen in Rome), or for a bishop to also be the royal chancellor or exchequer.

Courtesy Rank

Cardinals were clerics who officially held a position within the diocese of Rome, and would therefore take part in the election of the bishop of Rome, i.e., the pope. Since this was such an important function, powerful and influential churchmen from outside of Rome could be granted such a position, if only in name.

Cardinals should purchase a level of Courtesy Rank in addition to any levels of Religious Rank they may have. Examples: cardinal-deacon, cardinal-priest, or cardinal-bishop.

Independent Income

A churchman who controls a benefice -- an ecclesiastical fief, granting the holder the rights to all tithes in a parish -- but has the religious services in the parish administered by someone else (i.e., a vicar) has an Independent Income.

Medieval Education

Formal education in the Middle Ages was controlled by the church. Educated characters, including the vast majority of the clergy, would have been trained following the classical course of study called the seven liberal arts. The arts were divided into two courses of study: the trivium ("the three roads") and the quadrivium ("the four roads"). Most schools put more emphasis on the trivium. Studying the arts grants the following *GURPS* traits:

Trivium

- *Grammar:* Latin (Broken) minimum
- *Rhetoric:* Public Speaking
- *Dialectic (Logic):* Philosophy (Neoplatonism or Aristotelianism)

Quadrivium

Legal Enforcement Powers

Bishops and other churchmen who hold a court of canon law should take the 10-point version of this advantage with the limitation: *canon law only, -25%.*

Some clerics -- abbots and abbesses, for example -- were also feudal lords who administered justice for their lay tenants. They should take the 10-point version of Legal Enforcement Powers.

Legal Immunity

All clerics have a 5-point version of this advantage, called benefit of clergy, as part of the appropriate meta-trait. They could not be charged with any crime in a regular court of law, but were turned over to a church official for trial. Medieval canon law did not allow the death penalty in many crimes that would have ordinarily required it. In the early Middle Ages, anyone who could read Latin received benefit of clergy; later the requirements became more stringent.

Papal envoys and legates should add the "diplomatic pouch" option or take the Diplomatic Immunity variant.

Military Rank

PCs in religious orders of knighthood, such as the Knights Templar or the Hospitaliers, should take Military Rank (not Religious Rank) and the Regular Cleric meta-trait.

Military Ranks varied greatly in the Middle Ages. Below is a generic rank structure, roughly based on the ranks of the Knights Templar, that can be used as a model (note that the names of specific ranks would vary from order to order):

0. serving brother
1. brother-sergeant
2. knight
3. knight-banneret
4. knight-commander
5. master of the order
6. seneschal/marshal
7. grand master

Patrons

Any member of the clergy can claim the church itself as a Patron as reflected in the clerical Meta-Traits. This represents a cleric's ability to appeal to the church bureaucracy for help, or the possibility that the church might intercede on a cleric's behalf -- for example if a powerful noble was abusing the privileges of the clergy. This should be a remote possibility, and unlikely to achieve the exact results the character had hoped. GMs should not allow characters to buy off the Minimal Intervention limitation, or to improve the frequency of appearance.

Clerics are more likely to receive aid from a personal Patron who is a powerful member of the church or aristocracy (a local bishop, or an old friend in Rome, for example).

- *Arithmetic:* buy-off Innumerate
- *Geometry:* Mathematics/TL
- *Music:* Musical Composition
- *Astronomy:* Astronomy/TL

In addition to these subjects, most schools required the study of Theology. The trivium were taught thorough extensive reading and translation of classical texts. Therefore, it was common for most students to also learn History, Literature, and Expert Skill (Natural Philosophy) as part of a medieval education. Universities taught Law or Esoteric Medicine (substitute Physician/TL if the GM allows).

In the early Middle Ages (before 1050 AD), the tech level of Europe had stagnated at TL2 in science and reverted to TL1 in medicine. By the late Middle Ages (after 1250 AD), improvements such as the introduction of the astrolabe and positional mathematical notation, including zero, the rediscovery and enhancement of classical medical knowledge, and their dissemination through the new universities brought the TL up to 3 in all areas.

Power Investiture

GMs who allow mystical powers in their campaign should consider the relationship between the church and characters with such abilities. The establishment might take a dim view of "miracle workers," and historically many such people were outside the formal structure of the church and sometimes even in conflict with it. Alternatively, GMs may wish to restrict Power Investiture to ordained priests.

Status

Most clerics acquire their Status through Rank and Wealth. Powerful members of the secular clergy (such as the pope) should also purchase additional Status. Note that regular clerics are prevented from purchasing Status directly due to Disciplines of Faith.

Some monastic orders included lay brothers (conversi): monks drawn from the peasant classes. They were supposed to isolate the monks from worldly concerns, or to perform hard labor considered too difficult for nuns. Lay brothers should take Status -1 and the Regular Cleric meta-trait. They should not be allowed to purchase Rank, and are unlikely to be educated.

Tenure

Many positions within the church were granted for life (e.g., a bishop, the pope). GMs may wish to require this advantage for such positions. Also, university professors were members of the church (see Medieval Education box).

Vow

Celibacy and Chastity: In modern usage, chastity and celibacy are synonymous. In the Middle Ages, however, these terms had different meanings, and the issue of clerical marriage was highly controversial.

Chastity meant the complete renunciation of any sexual activity, and was required of all regular clergy. Symbolically, it represented the renunciation of the world -- the "mortification of the flesh" -- and complete devotion to spiritual pursuits. Chastity is a Minor Vow in *GURPS.*

Celibacy was the state of being unmarried, and was eventually required of those in major orders. Symbolically, it represented "marriage to the church" and the idea that clerical responsibilities outweighed family obligations. Legally, it meant that the children of a priest were automatically considered illegitimate, and therefore could not inherit. This was intended to keep church property under the control of church officials. Note that a priest who lived with a woman or had children was guilty of sinning, but not technically of breaking his vow (thus making it difficult to dismiss him from office). This bizarre -- and much abused -- quirk of medieval canon law arose out the centuries-long conflict between reformers who wanted all clerics to live like monks, and traditionalists who wanted the priesthood to remain like any other skilled profession: passed on from father to son. Celibacy is a Trivial (quirk-level) Vow in *GURPS.*

Silence: Most monastic orders required silence within certain areas of the monastery, such as the cloister or scriptorium, and at meal times. This should not count as a Vow, and can be assumed to be included in Disciplines of Faith. Some orders had more stringent requirements; follow the guidelines on page 161 of the *Basic Set.*

Poverty: Monastic rules usually forbad monks from owning personal property, but allowed the monastery to hold wealth in common. This type of vow is included in the Discipline of Faith disadvantage.

In the early 13th century, new orders of mendicant friars, such as the Franciscans, came into existence. These new orders prohibited members from holding wealth even in common. This is a Great Vow in *GURPS.* Note that characters cannot claim points from both Vow (Poverty) and Wealth (Dead Broke); see page 161 of the *Basic Set.*

Clerical Templates

The following three templates can be used to create common types of clerical characters. The templates are built on less then 75 points and therefore could be used in a 75-point campaign, or as low-powered NPCs in a more powerful campaign. In a higher powered campaign, these templates should be considered the bare minimum required for a heroic character built on the template, and the larger number of surplus points should be spent to improve the traits outlined below.

Monk   60 points

This template can be used to represent a member of a monastic community such as the Benedictines, Clunics, Cistercians, etc. The optional lenses can be added to create a female member of one for those orders, or to create a member of a mendicant order such as the Franciscans or Dominicans. The lenses may be combined to represent a female member of a mendicant order.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 12 [20]; HT 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: SM 0; Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.

Social Background: TL3 [0]; CF Western [0]; Language (Native) [0]; Latin (Accented) [4].

Advantages: Regular Cleric [10]; and 10 points chosen from Autotrance [1]; Charisma [5/level]; Common Sense [10]; Empathy [5 or 15]; Honest Face [1]; Intuition [15]; Less Sleep [2/level]; Pitiable [5]; Religious Rank [5/level]; Single-Minded [5]; Talent (Gifted Artist, Green Thumb, or Devotion) [5/level]; Talent (Healer) [10/level]; or Voice [10].

Disadvantages: -30 points chosen from Charitable [-15*]; Clueless [-10]; Compulsive Behavior [varies]; additional Disciplines of Faith [-5 to -15]; Fanaticism [-15]; Gullibility [-10*]; Hidebound [-5]; Honesty [-10*]; Incurious [-5]; Intolerance [-5 or -10]; Oblivious [-5]; Pacifism [varies]; Sense of Duty [varies]; Selfless [-5*]; Shyness [-5 to -15]; Skinny [-10 points]; Stubbornness [-5]; Truthfulness [-5*]; or additional Vow [-5 to -15].

Primary Skills: Religious Ritual-12 (IQ/H) [4]; Singing-12 (HT+1/E) [2].

Secondary Skills: Meditation-10 (Will-2/H) [1]; Theology-11 (IQ-1/H) [2]; and 3 points in Accounting (IQ/H), Administration (IQ/A), Artist (Calligraphy or Illumination) (IQ/H), Esoteric Medicine (Per/H), Farming/TL (IQ/A), First Aid/TL (IQ/E), Gardening (IQ/E), Law (IQ/H), Pharmacy/TL (Herbal) (IQ/H), Professional Skill (any) (DX or IQ/A), Research/TL (IQ/A), Teaching (IQ/A), or Writing (IQ/A).

Background Skills: Gesture-12 (IQ/E) [1]; Public Speaking-11 (IQ-1/A) [1]; 2 points in Astronomy/TL (IQ/H), Autohypnosis (Will/H), Expert Skill (Natural Philosophy) (IQ/H), History (IQ/H), Literature (IQ/H), Mathematics/TL (IQ/H), or Philosophy (IQ/H).

Nun: add Social Stigma (Second-Class Citizen) [-5]. 55 points.

Friar: add one of Vow (Poverty) [-15] or Wealth (Poor) [-15]. 45 points.

Priest   *65 points*

This template can be used to create a competent parish priest. Historically, many rural priests were barely competent and GMs should feel free to reduce skill levels or the comprehension level of Latin to represent incompetent NPCs. This template is also a good basis for high ranking secular clerics, such as bishops; simply increase Religious Rank

(and add enough Wealth to support the resulting Status).

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 10 [0].

Secondary Characteristics: SM 0; Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20; HP 10 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.

Social Background: TL3 [0]; CF Western [0]; Language (Native) [0]; Latin (Accented) [4].

Advantages: Secular Cleric [15]; Clerical Investment (Ordained) [2]; Religious Rank 3 [15]; Status 1 [0]   †; Wealth (Comfortable) [10]; plus 10 points chosen from Charisma [5/level]; Common Sense [10]; Empathy [5 or 15]; Honest Face [1]; Independent Income [1/level]; Intuition [15]; Pitiable [5]; additional Religious Rank [5/level]; Talent (Green Thumb, or Devotion) [5/level]; or Voice [10].

Disadvantages: A total of -30 point chosen from Charitable [-15*]; Clueless [-10]; Disciplines of Faith [-5 to -15]; Fanaticism [-15]; Gullibility [-10*]; Hidebound [-5]; Honesty [-10*]; Incurious [-5]; Intolerance [-5 or -10]; Oblivious [-5]; Pacifism [varies]; Sense of Duty [varies]; Selfless [-5*]; Shyness [-5 to -15]; Skinny [-10 points]; Stubbornness [-5]; Truthfulness [-5*]; or additional Vow [-5 to -15].

Primary Skills: Public Speaking-11 (IQ/H) [2]; Religious Ritual-12 (IQ+1/H) [8]; Theology-11 (IQ/H) [4].

Secondary Skills: Administration-10 (IQ-1/A) [1]; Singing-10 (HT/E) [1].

Background Skills: 3 points in Accounting (IQ/H); Area Knowledge (IQ/E); Carousing (HT/E); Current Affairs (IQ/E); Detect Lies (Per/H); Diplomacy (IQ/H); Farming/TL (IQ/A); Law (IQ/H); Philosophy (IQ/H); Politics (IQ/A); Propaganda (IQ/A); Psychology (IQ/H); Savior-Faire (High Society) (IQ/E).

Warrior Monk   *60 points*

This template can be used to represent a member of a religious order of knights such as the Knights Templar or the Hospitallers..

Attributes: ST 12 [20]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: SM 0; Dmg 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29; HP 12 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.

Social Background: TL3 [0]; CF Western [0]; Language (Native) [0].

Advantages: Regular Cleric [10]; Military Rank 2 [10]; Fit [5]. *Disadvantages:* Code of Honor (Chivalry) [-15]; remove Nonhazardous from Duty (in Metatrait) [-5]; -15 chosen from among Fanaticism [-15]; Honesty [-10*]; Intolerance [-5 or -10]; Overconfidence [-5*]; Sense of Duty [varies]; Selfless [-5*]; Shyness [-5 to -15]; Skinny [-10 points]; Stubbornness [-5]; Truthfulness [-5*]; or additional Vow [-5 to -15]

Primary Skills: Lance or Spear-12 (DX+1/A) [1]; Riding (Horse)-12 (DX+1/A) [1]; Shield-12 (DX+1/E) [1].

Secondary Skills: Broadsword or Axe/Mace-11 (DX/A) [1]; Savior-Faire (High Society)-11 (IQ+1/E) [1].

Background Skills: Heraldry-10 (IQ/A) [1]; Leadership-10 (IQ/A) [1]; Religious Ritual-8 (IQ-2/H) [1]; Brawling or Jumping-11 (DX/E) [1].

Sample Characters

The following characters were designed for realistic *GURPS Middle Ages* campaigns. Brother Owain was created for a

Saxon campaign or for use with *GURPS Vikings*. The second character, Archdeacon Hugh, was designed for a Norman campaign. Both make use of the rules outlined in this article.

Brother Owain, Infirmarian of Shrewsbury

Owain ap Madoc was born into a minor noble family in the Kingdom of Gwynedd in the later half of the 10th century. At the age of seven he entered the monastic school at Glastonbury, a center of the monastic revival occurring at the time. Owain excelled in his studies and took a keen interest medicine at an early age. He had plenty of opportunity to learn, as the abbey served as one of the only hospitals in England, and the site of a pilgrimage for the sick. At the age of 18, Owain took his vows and became an official member of the infirmary staff.

The next year, an expedition was planned to try to reestablish contacts -- severed in the last century by Viking raids -- with the famous monasteries surrounding the Irish Sea, such as Iona and Kells. Owain eagerly volunteered to go, and the small group of monks set out on their journey.

After almost a year of success, the delegation ended in tragedy. The monks arrived at a small monastery along the northern coast of Ireland, just as a band of Norwegian raiders attacked. Owain fought alongside his brothers before being badly wounded. The monks were eventually overwhelmed. However, Owain managed slip away in a small boat, but lost and losing blood, he passed out and drifted out to sea.

Miraculously, he washed ashore on a small island inhabited by a hermit named Éamon. The old man had once been part of a band of monks who fled to the island after their monastery was destroyed. The refugees had managed to rescue some of the precious books and vestments as they fled. Over the years the brothers had dwindled to just the lone monk.

Owain stayed on the island for five years learning Greek from the old hermit, and studying the rare books -- which contained knowledge thought lost by the rest of Europe. When Brother Éamon died, Owain decided it was time to return to Glastonbury.

His return was considered a miracle, and his fame as a physician grew due to the ancient knowledge he had recovered. Owain eventually moved to the tiny abbey of Shrewsbury on the Welsh border to help expand their infirmary.

Campaign Uses

The PCs are most likely to encounter Owain in his capacity as a physician. His medical skills make him highly sought out, and he may also be useful as a Greek translator.

Owain ap Madoc of Gwynedd   *125 points*

Age 32. 5'9", 145 lbs. An active and energetic Benedictine with sandy brown hair and blue eyes. Often disheveled and rarely seen without his bag of medicine, herbs, and medical instruments.

ST 9 [-10]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: SM 0; Dmg 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16; HP 10 [2]; Will 11 [-5]; Per 12 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.

Social Background: TL3* (TL2 Medical, -60%) [2]; CF Celtic [0]; CF Western [1]; Welsh (Native) [0]; Old English (Accented) [4]; Irish (Broken/None) [1]; Latin (Accented/Native) [5]; Ancient Greek (Broken/Accented) [3].

Advantages: Regular Cleric [10]; Religious Rank 3 [15]; Reputation +2 (as a skilled physician, by British intellectuals, small class, recognized 10 or less) [2]; Resistant to Disease (+3) [3]; Status 1 [0]   †; Talent (Healer) 2 [20].

Disadvantages: Insomniac (Mild) [-10]; Oblivious [-5]; Pacifism (Cannot Kill) [-15]; Sense of Duty (sick and injured) [-10].

Quirks: Attentive, Mumbles to himself while working, Humble, Dislikes Vikings, Messy (disheveled clothes and hair, often forgets to wash his hands, herbs and surgical instruments strewn all over his room or dumped at random in his bag) [-5].

Skills: Area Knowledge (Ireland)-12 (IQ/E) [1]; Area Knowledge (Wales)-12 (IQ/E) [1]; Astronomy/TL2-10 (IQ-2/H) [1]; Boating/TL3 (Unpowered)-10 (DX/A) [2]; Diagnosis/TL2-14 (IQ+2/H) [4] ‡; Esoteric Medicine (Hermetic)-15 (Per+3/H) [8] ‡; Expert Skill (Natural Philosophy)-12 (IQ/H) [4]; First Aid/TL2-14 (IQ/E) [1] ‡; Gardening-13 (IQ+1/E) [2]; Gesture-12 (IQ/E) [1]; Literature-10 (IQ-2/H) [1]; Mathematics/TL2 (Applied)-10 (IQ-2/H) [1]; Meditation-11 (Will/H) [4]; Naturalist-12 (IQ/H) [4]; Pharmacy/TL2 (Herbal)-14 (IQ+2/H) [4] ‡; Philosophy (Neoplatonism)-11 (IQ-1/H) [2]; Physiology/TL2-12 (IQ/H) [1] ‡; Public Speaking-11 (IQ-1/A) [1]; Religious Ritual (Catholic)-12 (IQ/H) [4]; Research/TL3-12 (IQ/A) [2]; Singing-12 (HT+1/E) [2]; Staff-11 (DX/A) [4]; Surgery/TL2-13 (IQ/VH) [4] ‡; Survival (Island/Beach)-11 (Per-1/A) [1]; Teaching-12 (IQ/A) [2]; Theology (Catholic)-12 (IQ/H) [4]; Weather Sense-11 (IQ/A) [1].

Archdeacon Hugh of Lincoln

Hugh was born in 1131 AD, the illegitimate but acknowledged son of a Norman knight, Henri de BÉthencourt, and Emma, a widowed dyer. He grew up in his mother's house with his older half-brother and sisters, helping out as much as possible in the family business. When in the city, his father would visit the family and fill the young boy's head with tales of valiant knights and glorious battles. At the age of seven his father arranged for Hugh to attend the cathedral school.

When his father was killed at the Battle of Lincoln in 1141, the young boy's prospects looked dim. Most of the father's wealth was inherited by his legitimate children, and Hugh's half-brother was set to inherit their mother's business. However, enough money was found to keep the boy in school, where he was already showing promise as a student.

On completing his studies, Hugh was able to secure a position as a clerk in the bishop's chancellery. His head for business, quick wit, and family ties to the local merchants soon made him invaluable to his employers. He rose quickly through the ranks acquiring several lucrative beneficences along the way, providing him with a stable income. By the time he was 25, the bishop had appointed him to one of the archdeaconries in the diocese.

Hugh's mistress is Edith, the daughter of a prominent wool merchant who handles the produce of the bishop's flocks. They share a posh townhouse, which Hugh much prefers over his few drafty rooms in the cathedral college. Edith has a growing wool trade in her own right, exporting wool out of Boston to Flanders. She and Hugh plan to use the land from his benefices to produce higher quality wool for their exports.

Though his wealth is secure, his political power is not. As the current bishop ages, Hugh fears he could be replaced when a new bishop is selected. His illegitimate birth, his relationship with Edith, and his close ties to the merchants of the city (including some in the Jewish community) make him extremely unpopular with the more pious members of the college. Fortunately for him, the current faction in power is much more concerned with the smooth operation of the diocese, than with the piety of its officials. But, Hugh knows the only way to safeguard his position and to ensure that his daughter will have a comfortable position in society is to secure a diocese of his own.

Campaign Uses

Hugh would be an ideal patron or enemy for a group of clerics or merchants. GMs could portray him as a sensible and pragmatic politician opposed by fanatical and intolerant enemies, or as a greedy and crass schemer who uses religious power to his own advantage.

Hugh Fitzhenry of Lincoln   *225 points*

28 years old. 5'11", 160 lbs. A handsome cleric with blonde hair, green eyes, and aquiline features.

ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 13 [60]; HT 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: SM 0; Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [-5]; Per 13 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.

Social Background: TL3 [0]; CF Western [0]; Norman French (Native) [0]; Middle English (Native/Broken) [4]; Latin (Accented/Native) [5].

Advantages: Secular Cleric [15]; Alcohol Tolerance [1]; Ally (Edith, 75% of point total, appears 12 or less; as Dependant, Loved one, appears 9 or less) [2]; Appearance (Attractive) [4]; Charisma 1 [5]; Contact Group (Merchants of Lincoln, business skills, effective skill 21, Somewhat Reliable, appears 12 or less) [8]; Independent Income 20 [20]; Patron (Robert de Chesney, Bishop of Lincoln, powerful individual, appears 9 or less) [10]; Religious Rank 5 [25]; Social Chameleon [5]; Status 3 [0] §; Talent (Business Acumen) 1 [10]; Talent (Smooth Operator) 2 [30]; Voice [10]; Wealth (Very Wealthy) [30].

Disadvantages: Dependant (Infant Daughter, 0 or fewer points, Loved one, appears 6 or less) [-15]; Duty (to the Bishop of Lincoln, Nonhazardous, occurs 12 or less) [-5]; Enemies (Political rivals, small group, Rival) [-5]; Greed (12) [-15]; Obsession (become a bishop, 9) [-15]; Obsession (find a noble husband for his daughter, 12) [-5]; Reputation -2 (unrepentant fornicator, pious Christians, small group, recognized 10 or less) [-2]; Selfish (15) [-3]; Vow (celibacy) [-1].

Quirks: Proud, Incompetence (Dancing), Wears brightly-dyed cloaks and hats over his clerical garb (-1 reaction from ascetics), Loves jewelry (particularly gaudy rings), Dislikes "the country" (unless he can go hawking) [-5].

Skills: Accounting-13 (IQ/H) [2]**; Acting-14 (IQ+1/A) [1] † †; Administration-15 (IQ+2/A) [4]**; Area Knowledge (Lincoln, city)-14 (IQ+1/E) [2]; Area Knowledge (Lincolnshire, county)-13 (IQ/E) [1]; Carousing-13 (HT+2/E) [1] † †; Current Afairs/TL3 (Regional, England)-15 (IQ+2/E) [4]; Detect Lies-14 (Per+1/H) [2] † †; Diplomacy-15 (IQ+2/H) [1] † † ‡ ‡; Falconry-12 (IQ-1/A) [1]; Fast-Talk-16 (IQ+3/A) [1] † † ‡ ‡; Finance-12 (IQ-1/H) [1]**; Games (Chess)-13 (IQ/E) [1]; Heraldry-12 (IQ-1/A) [1]; Law (Catholic Canon)-12 (IQ-1/H) [2]; Law (Norman England)-12 (IQ-1/H) [2]; Merchant-13 (IQ/A) [1]**; Philosophy (Neoplatonism)-11 (IQ-2/H) [1]; Politics-16 (IQ+3/A) [1] † † ‡ ‡; Propaganda/TL3-13 (IQ/A) [2]; Psychology-13 (IQ/H) [4]; Public Speaking-18 (IQ+5/A) [2] † † ‡ ‡ § §; Religious Ritual (Catholic)-11 (IQ-2/H) [1]; Research/TL3-12 (IQ-1/A) [1]; Ridding (Horse)-11 (DX+1/A) [4]; Savior-Faire (High Society)-15 (IQ+2/E) [1] † †; Theology (Catholic)-12 (IQ-1/H) [2].

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The Omniscient Eye

Can We Make More Room For Our Stuff?

**In many a sci-fi story, one finds artificial planets and such having been constructed.
So my simple question is: in a reasonably realistic SF RPG, what would be required to
make an artificial planet, a Dyson Sphere, a Ringworld or even a Death Star?**
--H.B. Seba

In short: lots of mass in the right place.

The first stage of any large-scale construction project will probably use asteroids. They're abundant, and small enough to be plausibly moved with only moderate technological advances from the present day.

Just a single asteroid or comet may well be enough artificial world for a small population; habitats can be built on the surface or tunnelled in for protection against radiation and debris. In more extreme cases, a metallic asteroid may be converted into a larger useful area by explosive centrifugal forming: the asteroid is cored and the hollow filled with water, then the whole body is spun and heated with reflected sunlight until the metallic composition softens enough to let the water flash to steam, leaving a hollow metallic shell ten times the size of the original asteroid. (If everything goes well. If not, well, there are always more asteroids.) This is known as a Cole habitat, from Cole and Cox's 1963 proposal.

Raising the temperature of iron from space-background to its melting point takes 800kJ/kg even ignoring radiation losses during the heating process; an asteroid two miles long by one in diameter will need about 3e19J, and solar mirrors seem the most practical way to provide this even in the main belt (at 3AU or so from the sun). Since radiation losses in space should not be ignored, we can calculate that that asteroid will be radiating heat at about 12TW just before it melts; at least a 300km square of solar mirrors will need to be focused on it in order to keep pace with the radiation losses and get it up to the melting point.

The original "Death Star" was either 120km or 160km in diameter, depending on the sources one believes. Assuming a density around three-quarters that of water, this would require up to 2e18kg, which represents a single large asteroid (18Melpomene is around 3e18kg) formed by an explosive technique. Alternatively and probably more easily one could take an even larger asteroid, such as 9Metis at 235×195×140km, and hollow it out, throwing away much of its mass. While the propulsion and weapon systems may be fantastic, the size of the structure is not.

Actually constructing a habitat, rather than using a preexisting asteroid, presents more challenges, but if the basics of zero-G construction can be mastered it seems likely that smelting a metallic asteroid into steel is mostly a problem of size and manpower rather than theory. The three best-known designs to date are the Bernal sphere (Islands One and Two in Gerard O'Neill's proposal from 1977), which is easy to build but has a comparatively small area of useful gravity, the massive O'Neill cylinder (Island Three), and the Stanford Torus. The detailed design studies of sphere and torus planned for populations of around 100,000; the full-blown 20-mile-long cylinder was intended for tens of millions.

Of course, in most hard-science settings humans still require gravity to maintain their health; if not a full gravity, at least 0.25g or so. There are several main ways of providing gravity or a reasonable facsimile of it to an artificial world:

1) Mass. The way the Earth does it. The obvious drawback is that if the habitat is to be capable of maneuver, this will severely affect its performance.

If one could work with neutron-degenerate matter (neutronium), with a density of 4e17kg/m^3, one would need only a

very small amount to produce a livable gravity field. The smaller the habitat, however, the greater the problems with tidal forces (gravity gradients); a 1.5e15kg chunk of neutron-degenerate matter (which would occupy a cube 16cm on a side) would have a 1g field only 101m away from its center . . . but 10 stories up the gravity would have dropped to only 0.6g, which is bad news for any large machinery (and unlike the rotating habitat there's no nearby zone of zero-g). Quantum black holes, assuming they exist, suffer from similar problems.

Limiting oneself to conventional matter, the densest material is iridium at 22,650kg/m^3, or osmium at very slightly less. A 1g field would need a sphere of iridium 1,550km in radius, some 3.5e23kg. This exceeds by two orders of magnitude the total mass of the asteroids in the Main Belt; barring the discovery of unexpected iridium-rich Kuiper Belt objects, it seems likely that some technology for elemental synthesis would be required. A 0.25g field would need only a 400km radius sphere, 6e21kg, but again without interstellar shipping of iridium or a transmutation technology this will not be practical.

A slightly less dense material would be no more practical: for 1g, tungsten (or gold) at 19,250kg/m^3 would require an 1,820km radius sphere massing 4.9e23kg; silver, at 10,490kg/m^3, 3,340km and 1.66e24kg. Again, this would require more of the specific matter than exists in the solar system. For other materials, note that the radius needed is directly proportional to the surface gravity and inversely proportional to the material's density; going further down the density scale, the size of the habitat reaches something approximating that of Earth, a true "artificial planet." Unfortunately the mass of Earth is some 2,000 times that of all the Main Belt asteroids; to get the mass to build a second Earth would require the dismantling of existing planets. An artificial planet with a gravity of 0.25g made of Earth-like material (mostly iron) would have a radius of 1,600km.

2) Rotation. The only real problem is the coriolis effect: the deflection of moving objects inside a spinning body, caused by the rotating reference frame and the inertia of the objects. In a sufficiently small environment, this is likely to cause problems with balance; the threshold for most of the population seems to be a spin no faster than 2rpm, which implies a 224m radius for a 1g acceleration or 55m for 0.25g. This approach to artificial gravity seems the most likely to be practical; it lends itself to large ring-shaped or cylindrical habitats.

3) Acceleration. Putting a large drive on the habitat and accelerating constantly will produce a simulacrum of gravity. No real-world space drive, either extant or hypothetical, is capable of sustained acceleration at this level.

4) Tidal forces. A pair of habitats linked by a tether, in orbit round a much more massive body (e.g. two satellites orbiting Earth), will experience acceleration as the habitats attempt to follow different orbits but are constrained by the linkage. In the real world this is used to keep satellites pointed in a particular direction; the gradients are too small to produce useful artificial gravity for humans.

5) Magnetism. Assuming that vastly powerful magnetic fields are not harmful to human beings in the long term, this is a possible means of generating an attractive force. However, any non-diamagnetic materials (such as ferrous metals) would have to be removed completely from the habitat; no electrical systems would operate reliably; and current field generation techniques (which have successfully been used to levitate a frog) can only produce small spots of "neutralised gravity."

6) Gravity waves. Any artificial generation of gravity tends to take the world out of the realm of "reasonably realistic sci-fi."

Assembling multiple asteroids allows larger habitats than using them one at a time, but these are different only in scale, and do not approach the really large sizes of classical artifical worlds. Once one has the technology to disassemble gas giants, larger options become available.

A ringworld provides gravity by rotation; the classical model, at 2AU across with a star in the center, spins at around 1,200km/s for 1g. The ringworld needs some sort of propulsion system to keep it centered on its sun; it also requires strong materials -- indeed, the required tensile strength approaches that of the strong nuclear force, well beyond anything achievable with conventional matter, and even an estimate of the mass required is impossible. The sun is always directly overhead; providing darkness would require orbiting structures large enough to cast shadows.

Fortunately, a ringworld does not need to be that large to be useful; the required tensile strength is proportional both to radius and to spin gravity, so while a "one day" ringworld (300 times the size of Earth, spinning once in 24 hours for 1g) is still beyond currently-hypothesized materials, smaller ones might well be possible. The most that might be achieved with current materials assumes that carbon nanotubes live up to expectations; these would support a ring as wide as the Earth, spinning once in about 1.4 hours for 1g, or one four times the size spinning once in about 6 hours for 0.25g.

Even the classical Ringworld can coexist with others in a single solar system. The next step up most certainly cannot: this is the Dyson sphere, based on a misunderstanding of Freeman Dyson's 1959 paper "Search for Artificial Stellar Sources of Infra-Red Radiation," a shell which encloses a star completely. This requires construction on a massive scale, disassembling at least the mass of Jupiter in order to create the structure. Even all of the available 3e28kg of our own solar system other than the Sun, assuming it could be transmuted to the density of iron, would provide a structure a little under 20m thick at 1au from the Sun.

The solid Dyson sphere has several drawbacks. It needs some form of propulsion system to keep it centered on its sun; there is no gravitational attraction to the inside of the sphere (it could be spun to provide gravity at the equator, but just as with ringworlds this runs into problems of tensile strength), so anything inside it will slowly fall away into the star unless an inner, presumably transparent, sphere is provided to prevent this; as on the ringworld, it's always noon unless there's an inner shadow-casting structure (perhaps mounted on that transparent sphere); and one cannot see the stars. Most serious, though, are thermodynamic considerations: all the energy output of the star has to pass through and be radiated from the outer surface of the sphere (having presumably been used by humans first, and converted to waste heat), and even at 1AU that energy flux will be substantial, leaving the sphere itself at 120° Celsius. Since the absolute temperature varies as the fourth root of the star's energy output and the eighth root of the radius, expanding the sphere may well be adequate to solve the problem; at 2AU radius, Sol's Dyson sphere would be at 5° Celsius, and at 3AU radius -45° Celsius.

A more extreme version of this system, which generally ignores thermodynamic considerations, has multiple concentric Dyson spheres; Colin Kapp's *Cageworld* series and Charlie Stross' *Accelerando* both involve such a setup. Although the potential living area is immense, the energy available to the outer spheres would be of such low density that it is hard to see this working well for biological life.

Dyson's actual suggestion was for a swarm of smaller objects, on carefully calculated non-intersecting orbits (in practice each would need its own propulsion system, with consequent requirements for energy and reaction mass and hazards from waste propellant), which would collectively capture as much of the parent star's energy as was needed. This is somewhat more practical, not least because it can be constructed by stages as it is required and still be useful in its partial state, rather than needing the full-blown commitment of the solid sphere.

When a Dyson sphere does not provide enough surface area, perhaps an Alderson disc will. This is a solid disc surrounding the sun in one plane, thick

Equilibrium And Stability: Will It Crash Into The Sun?

Ringworlds, Dyson spheres, and Alderson discs are all symmetric around their sun. This means that assuming they're strong enough to withstand internal stresses, they will be in gravitational equilibrium -- to start out. But will they stay that way?

After some rather involved calculus, it turns out that Ringworlds and Alderson discs are antistable, like a marble balanced on top of a needle. If one of these structures is nudged even slightly off-center, the sun's gravitational pull will pull it further and further away from equilibrium, until one end of the world falls into the sun (if structural stresses don't tear it apart first). Preventing this from happening requires a lot of active correction -- giant rockets on the outside, or some such -- to keep the world balanced around its sun.

Considering only gravity, Dyson spheres are in neutral equilibrium, like a marble on a smooth floor. A Dyson sphere nudged off-center won't gain speed of its own accord, but it won't slow down either; left to its own devices it'll slowly drift. It will eventually need some correction to keep it from drifting into the sun, but not nearly as much as a Ringworld or an Alderson disc. However, thermal effects mean that a Dyson sphere is actually slightly antistable: the side closer to the sun gets hotter,

enough that local gravity is vertical, at least more than a few thousand miles away from the inner and outer edges; a wall round the inner edge prevents the atmosphere from drifting into the sun. Construction requires exotic matter and interstellar importation of mass, since the disc weighs rather more than the sun itself. To generate day and night cycles, the sun needs to be moved up and down through the hole in the middle of the disc (while not at all a trivial task, it's easier than moving the disc itself); the sun will still never be much above the horizon. Shadow generators in the style of a ringworld could also do the job, as would artificial light sources such as large mirrors orbiting or suspended over the surface of the disc. Only a relatively small area at the 1AU radius is habitable by humans, but perhaps aliens from hotter or cooler worlds might share the construction costs -- the useless edge zones make a narrower disc less cost-effective. While hard numbers on the Alderson disc are lacking, an ultra-strong material of the density of iron would need to be nearly as thick as the diameter of a planet with the same gravity.

radiates more thermal photons into space, and is thus propelled by photon pressure further towards the sun. (Most of the radiation directed inwards is caught by the other side of the sphere and so does not contribute enough net thrust to balance out this effect.)

The final macrostructure to be considered is Pat Gunkel's topopolis, a hollow tube (perhaps a few miles across) long enough to form a circle round the Sun at the 1AU radius. It spins for gravity; the torsion effects of curvature are effectively negligible. Much like ringworlds, multiple structures can coexist, and indeed be joined together; not only could the topopolis embed its parent star in a massive hairball, but if power were transmitted along it it could eventually stretch to multiple stars.

In summary, the main prerequisite for artificial structures up to the miniature ringworld size is the ability to move large amounts of mass round the solar system; to build larger than that, very substantial amounts of exotic materials are needed, implying matter transmutation and the disassembly of planets, and for the largest structures interstellar transfers of mass.

--Roger Burton West

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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 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!

What Status Gets You

Subsidiary Privileges of Status in *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Matt Riggsby

The description of the Status advantage notes that, in addition to reaction bonuses, it grants "various privileges," which must be determined by the GM. Unfortunately, except for a brief sample of the kind of lifestyle the cost of living associated with Status can buy, that's where the guidance on those privileges stops. While application of Status is moderately clear in feudal societies, where there are few organizations to complicate the picture with Rank and other advantages, it's rather less clear in more organized, bureaucratic societies (does a Byzantine logothete have Rank, Status, or both? And how much of each?). It's even possible to wonder if Status is still relevant in a modern, "democratic" society where there's no officially acknowledged and supported ruling class and other advantages, such as Rank, Reputation, and Wealth, could be feasibly be used to represent power and position. This article examines a number of privileges a GM might consider awarding as a result of Status, how they might manifest differently in a number of settings beyond the usual feudal system, and what the limits of those privileges might be, giving way to other distinct advantages.

Personal Staff

Someone with Status has "people." These may include domestic servants, secretaries and other junior bureaucrats, legal advisors, and the like. Their purpose is to take care of tedious everyday tasks which keep the character from getting on with more important work. They might deliver messages on the character's behalf, make arrangements for transportation or lodging away from home, keep an eye on the character's residence while he's away, and take on similar tasks.

At low TLs, a character with Status 1 or 2 will have a single full-time servant, with at least one more per additional level of Status. For modern societies, where full-time servants are rare, a character will probably have a lot of part-time help. That might include such things as a nanny for the character's children, maid and landscaping services, and a part-time cook for dinners and special meals. At higher levels of Status, one's staff may include professional advisors. A high-status Medieval nobleman may retain a priest or monk, an early modern traveler may bring his personal physician with him, and a modern businessman or politician might keep a lawyer, broker, or personal spokesman on retainer.

Followers or employees who come with Status aren't invariably reliable. Some may have deep loyalty to the high-status character, but for most, it's just a job, and they'll bail out if the going gets too rough for them. They will be reluctant to take on what they see as dangerous or potentially illegal tasks. For example, a servant might mail a package for the character if there's no reason to believe the act will endanger him, but might balk at it if he knew that he was mailing a bomb or a box full of drugs. They are also unlikely to participate in anything which could reasonably be regarded as an adventure. For more generally useful followers, particularly ones who would be useful in or around combat and illegal activities, a character must use the Ally advantage.

Group Membership

People with high Status can join organizations (the cost of which is likely covered by the regular cost of living) not open to those beneath them. The most obvious type for modern characters is an exclusive country or gentleman's club. Indeed, some country clubs could be described in terms of the minimum Status required to join. A modern game world could also include shadowy, semi-secret groups, somewhere between a fraternity and a conspiracy (Yale's fabled Skull and Bones society would qualify), where powerful individuals with similar interests and objectives meet for companionship and more formal business or political activities. High Status would be a prerequisite for membership

here as well.

Deferential Law Enforcement

The higher a character's Status, the more likely law enforcement is to give him the benefit of their discretion. This may be out of respect for the high-status character or simply because of the officer's desire not to make trouble for someone who could ruin his career. Someone with high Status will be able to make parking and speeding tickets go away with relative ease (for friends and relatives as well as for himself) by overawing the ticketing officer or by asking a sympathetic judge or senior officer to fix the problem. He will also receive more responsive service when he calls the police, taking priority when higher authorities hand out assignments.

As long as there's no strong reason for an officer to detain him, a high-status character may be able to escape questioning if he is discovered under mildly suspicious circumstances. For example, if a character with high Status is encountered near a bank which has just been burgled at 3 AM, an officer might send him off with a warning to watch out for dangerous thieves (not bothering to check his briefcase, which is full of $100 bills and a ski mask), whereas one without Status might be searched and arrested. He may also receive advance notice that he may be investigated for a crime, so long as the character is not a prime suspect.

There are limits, though. Status gives a character legal courtesies, but few lawmen could ignore someone strolling down the street with a loaded weapon and taking cheerful potshots at widows and orphans along the way. The ability to willfully ignore significant criminal laws requires the Legal Immunity advantage.

Access to Events

The higher a character's Status, the more other people will want him around. A character with Status 1-3 will regularly be invited to events of local importance: charity fundraisers, local political victory parties (assuming the character wasn't a notable opponent of the victor), theater openings, home-team sporting events, and the like. In settings where personal bonds are particularly important (say, anything resembling a feudal system or other system of personal patronage), weddings, rites of passage such as christenings and bar mitzvas, and religious ceremonies are part of the mix. He may even be asked to preside over such events.

Characters of higher Status are invited to such events *constantly* (or, if they haven't been invited, can get in anyway) to the point where they could never even think of attending all of them. They also start to receive invitations to events of regional and national significance: sporting championships, major theatrical events to which some connection to the character can be made (e.g.: starring someone from the character's home town), concerts by nationally famous performers, royal weddings, inaugurations, and coronations. By Status 6, a character can attend just about any event he cares to whether he has been invited or not.

High Status also means better treatment at such events. At many Roman theaters, high-status families and civic officials were guaranteed front-row seats. In many churches, high-status families were likewise visibly seated in front. At modern concerts and theaters, a high-status character might get good seats and enjoy backstage access, allowing him to meet artists who are otherwise protected from the general public. Clubs and parties might also have VIP rooms, where a high-status character can talk exclusively to other high-status or otherwise notable people.

Access To Peers

Although it may manifest in many different ways, many of the advantages of Status could be summed up as "access to peers." One of the biggest advantages of high Status is access to other people with high Status. The average man on the Medieval street is less likely to meet the Duke of Earl than the Count of Bassie is, even if that man happens to live across the street from the Duke while Count lives 50 miles away. The Count and the Duke, being members of similar social strata, will associate with the same people, attend the same parties, and consider one another's children as material for marriage alliances. Going by raw reaction penalties, someone with Charisma or Appearance is far more likely to impress someone with high Status than a character who has just Status. However, a character with Status is far more likely to be able to get close enough for that such advantages will matter.

Easy Credit

Financiers will be more likely to provide high-status characters with funds when asked. This is particularly the case in historical societies, where moneylenders were frequently in a precarious social position and bought security by accumulating obligations from needy noblemen and governments. Moneylenders will be driven by the hope that high-status debtors will have access to reserves normal people don't (a wealthy merchant with low Status may be conventionally a better credit risk, but a high Status nobleman might be able to confiscate somebody else's estates to pay off a debt) and the fear that not providing loans will trigger retribution. That can be useful in the short run and is very good for business-savvy characters who might need capital to start a business or outfit an expeditionary force to attack a loot-rich target, but historically this made it very easy for characters with Status to end up with a lot of points in the Debt disadvantage.

Extravagant Display

Status-based legal limits on display and consumption are essentially a thing of the past, but they were once common. Many historical societies were rife with sumptuary laws governing who could own or use certain kinds of clothing, vehicles, homes, symbols, and other items. Needless to say, the best things were reserved for people with higher Status. For example, the size and design of one's carriage, the number of horses allowed to pull it, and the number of footmen one could bring along might be governed by one's Status. Higher Status means a bigger carriage and more horses and retainers. Clothing colors, styles, and materials were regulated by a dizzying array of laws. Only Roman patricians could wear a particular shade of purple derived from murex shells, only Medieval knights and noblemen could have coats of arms, and only the upper class in Renaissance Venice was allowed to wear silk. This kind of distinction has largely vanished in the modern world, but in many historical societies, the powerful were easy to spot.

Offices

When it comes down to it, Status means power. Someone with Status probably holds an official position of power in his society, and if he doesn't, is in a good position to obtain one, or at least can influence who does reach such offices.

At lower levels of Status, the character may simply have the privilege of voting. Until the past century or so, republics from Athens to early modern Britain have had a middling-sized middle or upper class which was able to pick members of the government. In a society where eligible voters are limited by multiple significant factors (for example, two or more of sex, ethnicity, property or income, additional age past legal adulthood, religion, family membership) and voters are consequently a small minority, the right to vote is probably good reason to buy at least Status 1.

Someone at the top levels of Status for his society is a decision-maker with more direct authority over official policies and the lives of others. For characters without other advantages, this influence will be indirect or constrained. High-status characters may be legislators, who ultimately set rules for society but have little day to day control, or judges, who have considerable power over anyone brought before them but only within the bounds of the law. Characters in executive positions (this includes many historical noblemen as well as modern officials) are likely to have Allies, Law Enforcement Powers, Rank, and other advantages as well, though some may have Status only.

In societies where political rights are restricted by Status, Status is also a likely prerequisite for Rank, particularly Rank within official bodies. For example, a Renaissance city-state might employ anyone good enough with a sword as a guardsman or soldier (Rank 0), and senior men might become sergeants (Rank 1; historical organizations tend to have flat hierarchies and not many ranks). However, the captain of the guard and any officer in the army (Rank 2) would have to be at least Status 2 or 3. This can easily create a glass ceiling, with competent underlings stalled out at junior ranks while watching less competent aristocratic officers come and go. Administrative Rank is another area where Status is a likely prerequisite.

In modern societies, it's likely to be the other way around: a high level of Rank may confer Status as well. Any boy

can grow up to be President, but having become President, he retains influence and a number of social privileges for the rest of his life.

Pyramid Review

Ticket to Ride -- USA 1910

Published by [Days of Wonder](#)

Designed by Alan R. Moon

110 Train cards, 69 Destination Tickets, two bonus cards, & rules; full color, in a collectible tin; $15

Ticket to Ride may not have the little strategic touches that entered the line with the sequel games, but it has something the Europe and Marklin entries don't: a brand new supplement, *USA 1910.*

There's a whole lot of reprinted material here, and you've never been so glad to fork over $15 bucks for previously released stuff. First, for anyone who's ever had to suffer through the torments of shuffling the teeny-tiny cards from the original *Ticket to Ride* set, the Train cards have all been reproduced at a "normal" size, something you can get a grip on in your meaty paws. Same with the Destination Tickets -- they don't require a lot of mixing during the game, but they've been increased to match and the values have been corrected (some were found to be too valuable for the territory they covered). You get the Longest Route Bonus Card writ large, too.

The set contain a new bonus card, the Globetrotter. Instead of (or perhaps in addition to) creating the longest contiguous rail line, you can get 15 extra points if you complete the most Destination Tickets overall. Since you also get 35 new Destination Tickets for the mix, this scattershot approach is pretty doable. Predicting your opponents' moves isn't going to be the breeze that once it was, either. Add to all this a set of the four out-of-print Mystery Train supplement cards (they were in a freebie pack given away on the convention circuit), and you have a great mix of old and new.

It's another component success story, starting with the container. It may be one of the first instances in which the box is nicer than the pieces it holds. You get a swell little tin (a bit larger than, say, a paperback book) with a colorful face for holding the pieces. This won't fit easily into your core set so you may be stuck dragging both boxes to the table with you (and the tin doesn't lock down tight), but at least the elements are traveling in style. The cards inside are just a bit thinner than you might expect from a European-style board game, particularly a problem when dealing with the oft-shuffled Train cards. But hey, the illustrations are good and there are a lot of subtle visual things that have to be on those new cards, and they're all elegantly and clearly put in place. The one strange thing: Upon opening the container, one discovers the almost overpowering smell of the paints or inks or whatever was used to print the cards. Leave it open overnight or let it sit in a sunbeam for the afternoon and it ought to dissipate.

Although the winning conditions remain the same -- getting the most points by the end of the game -- the rules offer three new ways to reach your objective. The 1910 game uses only the new Destination cards and the Globetrotter bonus, so anything you've learned from overplaying the original set won't do you much good. You're going to be building more lines because the larger concentrations are of no use. The Mega Game uses all the cards and both the bonuses, but you have to draw and complete a lot more tickets throughout the game -- use those train cars sparingly, and be wary of using the "I'll draw another Destination -- maybe it's something I've already connected" gambit. The last wrinkle in the rules is the Big Cities game. A number of larger burgs are flagged in red (New York, Los Angeles, Miami, etc.), and only cards showcasing these goals are used as the ticket deck. Not only does this mix up the selection of old and new tickets in play, it means everyone is focused on trafficking through these hubs, making success much trickier. Get there early to at least some of the major junctions or be left behind. Interfering with opponents is not just practical or expected . . . it's necessary, something you can't usually get from the regular game.

It may grate on the buyer to shell out money for what is, in some ways, a correction to Days of Wonder's design oversights, but it feels awfully good to wrap your fingers around these cards. The lifespan of the game is extended, and the quick addition of three new involving-but-simple strategy sets (using only one slim page of rules, in nine different languages) makes **Ticket to Ride -- USA 1910** a pretty good purchase for long-standing fans who want to remain fans.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Dead of Night: The Little Book of Horrors

Published by Steampower Publishing

Written by Merwin Shanmugasundaram & Andrew Kenrick

Cover by Eric Lofgren

Illustrated by Eric Lofgren & Michael Cunliffe

224-page 4¼"×5½" b&w softcover; $19.95

The first thing that you notice about *Dead of Night: The Little Book of Horrors* is that "littleness." This is a pocket RPG, but still big enough to tackle the horror genre, and more specifically, the horror of the campfire tales, the B-movie, and the urban myth. Being pocket friendly, *Dead of Night* is designed to be played anywhere, and to that end is mechanically simple, and can be played with or without dice. Although it employs two 10-sided dice, the authors tell you how other dice can be used, and when no dice are available, both players and GM can stab a finger at the table of random numbers on the last page. Admittedly, I would have preferred to have a random number on each page so that the dice rolls would be generated by flipping pages, but *Dead of Night* also counters its portability by players still requiring characters sheets. That said, since one of the game's character sheets is the size of a Post-It note, this is less of a problem.

The table of random numbers is one several factors that make *Dead of Night* easy to pick up and play. The most obvious being the clearly marked "Quickboxes" that neatly summarize the rules, the creation and handling of both characters and monsters, the ready-to-play monsters and NPCs (both of which can double as player characters), and the five ready-to-play scenarios. And for the GM, there is Tension, a method of measuring and controlling the horror within a scenario from one scene to the next.

The book itself is decently illustrated and written. A nice touch is that the color fiction is used to illustrate the rules, and also, that the fiction, plus various character and monster write-ups are presented in different fount. That said, in places the book does expose the reader to rules before they are fully explained, which is disconcerting, but return to the explanations and they fall into place. Running throughout the book are almost 30 genre clichés, such as "Splitting up to explore the haunted house is never a good idea." and "Darkened woods and dead ends are the escape routes of choice." Obeying these clichés not only means that the players are sticking to the genre, it also rewards them with an aid to survival.

Characters are defined by four sets of paired attributes, Identify/Obscure, Persuade/Dissuade, Pursue/Escape, and Assault/Protect. To generate a character, 10 points are divided between each pair. A Specialization can be taken for each pair, equal to the highest attribute +2, and in return, two points have to be deducted from the pair. Thus a Park Ranger would start with Identify 7/Obscure 3, Persuade 6/Dissuade 4, Pursue 7/Escape 3, and Assault 4/Protect 6. With Specializations this becomes Identify 5/Obscure 3 Guide 7, Persuade 4/Dissuade 4 Position of Authority 8, Pursue 7/Escape 3, and Assault 3/Protect 5 Survive No Matter What 8. Beyond this, a character begins the game with five Survival Points and can have whatever description or deficiencies a player desires, although this has no mechanical effect.

Monsters use the same attributes as characters, but have access to Advanced Specializations such as Assimilation or Dead Already. These cost Survival Points to use, but a monster can negate this by taking a Vulnerability. For example,

Assault (the monster is susceptible to a particular type of attack, such as silver for the werewolf) or Inhibition (an attribute pair is reduced to zero under certain situations, for example, a demon trapped in a pentagram will have nothing for its Pursue/Escape attributes). The standard monsters are included in Dead of Night, but a GM can easily design his own using these mechanics.

Mechanically, Dead of Night is very simple. For any action two 10-sided dice are rolled and the result added to an appropriate attribute or Specialization to beat a Target of 15. This never changes except for a Conflict Check in combat, where the Target is ten plus an opponent's appropriate attribute or Specialization. For example, to successfully track the werewolf (which he merely thinks to be a wolf), the Park Ranger rolls the dice plus Pursue against his quarry's Escape 4 to give a Target of 14.

Combat is kept simple by only having the active player or monster roll the Conflict Check. Likewise, initiative is kept simple by having the players determine the order of their actions, and the danger is, anyone blurting out an action actually seizes the initiative and takes that action -- whatever it is!

What is at stake during the fight is Survival Points, both those of the characters and the monsters. Survival Points represent both hit points and a resource to spend on various effects. These include temporarily flipping the values of an attribute pair, re-rolling a check, interrupting another player's action, and to activate certain Advanced Specializations like sorcery. They are gained by rolling doubles on a successful check, meaningfully advancing the plot, playing to clichés, playing well, and resting. Plus surviving the scenario. They are lost whenever a Conflict Check is failed, but a monster can gain Survival Points if a player rolls 13 and fails it.

Where the players and monsters have Survival Points, the GM has Tension. Using this tool, a GM can measure and handle the horror within a scenario. It is on a scale from 1 to 15, with most scenarios starting at 5. As the GM increases the Tension, the horror grows until it is outright visceral and in your face at 15. One way of increasing Tension, at least temporarily, is by having the monster appear. When that happens, the Tension increases by an amount equal to the monster's current Survival Points. It lowers back down when the monster exits the scene. It also raises whenever a Survival Point is lost or expended. The GM will lower Tension by using it to modify a player's current task. The point of this is to advance the plot that the failed roll would otherwise stall. For example, the players need to find a clue vital to the scenario, but fail the roll. The GM spends a Tension point, modifies the player's roll, he succeeds, and the current tension is lowered.

This raises the question, why not just have the characters find the clue anyway? This rule sort of counters this problem by finding a mechanical way around it, but it still feels like an artifice. The balance between Survival Point loss and Tension increase is interesting, but throughout the description of the rules for Tension, you never quite get a feel for how they work. The guidelines feel underdeveloped and perhaps a fully worked would have helped. That said, the five scenarios do include suggestions as to the various moods and situations at the differing Tension levels.

Several types of horror and styles of play that can be run with *Dead of Night* are suggested and discussed. The horror types include Grim Fatalism, Traditional Horror, Dark Comedy, Slapstick Horror, and Schlock Horror, and each is given a solid thumbnail description. The suggested play styles include Tables Turned, where the players take the roles of monsters against the GM controlled victims; Target Countdown, in which the victims die in a pre-determined order; No Single GM, where there's no GM or where everyone referees; and Wolf in Sheep's Clothing, which has one or more PCs as a disguised monster. The descriptions for these play styles are more expansive than those for the horror types, and are consequently more useful.

The game comes with five scenarios, though they are more detailed outlines than full adventures, and the GM will need to use the monsters given earlier in the book. In turn, they trap the characters in a haunted house, have them hunted by a mummy, chased by a demon car, working on a film set where the zombies are a little too realistic and hungry, and attending a Halloween party at which somebody is not actually wearing a costume. In addition, each scenario suggests how it might be run in the various different styles. Whatever the style, each scenario is worth an evening's play.

As a game, *Dead of Night* is small but playable, giving a simple set of rules that are quick and easy. The dearth of Survival Points means that the game starts with players already nervous, and the monsters are pleasingly unfussy and

brutal. As a design, **Dead of Night** does not quite achieve its aims. First, its treatment of the horror genre is too generic and not specific enough to the genres it wants to emulate -- the B-movie and Hammer Horror. Second, the mechanics for Tension, while interesting, are not fully realized and feel forced. A more minor point is the price, which feels big given the game's size.

Although short on game types, **Dead of Night** offers an agreeable array of play styles and can be run with almost no reference to the rules. More generic than intended, **Dead of Night: The Little Book of Horrors** is not only likeable, but is also easy to play and easy to run with nicely handled pick up and play features.

--Matthew Pook

Reigniting Previously Blazed Trails

What do *Family Circus, Ultima V,* and *The Da Vinci Code* have in common?

Okay; for those of you whose skulls have not exploded and who haven't thrown up a bit in your mouth, allow me to continue.

Family Circus, the heartwarming drawn feature that Scott McCloud contends isn't a comic in its weekday one-panel iterations, has a recurring feature wherein one of the characters will take a convoluted path; we, the audience, merely see the squirrly loopy dotted line connecting the starting point and the end point, followed by a panel with a punchline. Thus the comic might begin showing an overhead map of the beach, with precocious five-year-old Billy wandering from a boardwalk vendor past a bunch of dogs, around a sand castle, hopping along the beach, roaming among some sunbathers on blankets, and finally ending up at his family's spot, with the final panel saying, "I don't know why your ice cream melted, Daddy; I came right here!" For the reader, the fun comes in retracing Billy's steps and witnessing the hijinks that skamp got into.

The plot of the game *Ultima V* (my first *Ultima* and one of my favorite games of the "golden era" of computer RPGs) revolves around the disappearance of the beloved monarch Mary Sue . . . err, Lord British. The noble king -- who, in previous installments had been impervious to all damage -- led an expedition to the Underworld, a newly discovered labyrinthine area under the kingdom. One of the documents in the game's packaging was an accounting of the expedition by someone else who was on the journey. Within the game it's possible to follow that document to retrace the steps of that doomed voyage; landmarks and directions are explicit without being obvious, and attempting to follow them brings about a paradoxical sensation: fear that you aren't following the directions correctly, and fear that you *are.* (Of course, following those directions early in the game would be a near-suicidal gesture, but it needs to be done at some point in the adventure . . .)

The Da Vinci Code (based on a true fabrication of the same name) follows something of a similar pattern, where the heroes retrace the steps of . . . oh, danged if I can remember. It involved a cheesy Rubik's Tube and a 17-chapter car chase. (The same basic pattern was also seen in author Dan Brown's earlier piece *Angels & Demons,* noteworthy because it contained illustrations that looked the same way upside-down or right-side up, a feature that some critics contend also applies to the book itself.)

Anyway, the common thread weaving these three digressions together is, of course, the following of a path. It's a technique I haven't used too much in my own gaming, which -- in thinking about it -- is surprising, since it's a natural shape for an adventure. The heroes find a journal or accounting of a journey, and they set out to retrace those steps to discover what happened, or what needs to be done to fix whatever they *know* happened. It's a natural shape for a mystery or horror story ("If you are reading this, it is because I have failed, My tale begins in the library where I hid the key to my laboratory . . ."). It also provided the basis for my suggestion to the inimitable Ken Hite when I said, "Wouldn't it be neat to retrace *Around the World in 80 Days?*" Technically any pirate-treasure-style map falls into this category, but most such maps aren't the same in my mind because they don't provide a richness or texture for following the journey.

Anyway, for those wishing to add this type of story to their own games, here are a few tips I came up with in analyzing the literature I could think of.

There needs to be a reason not to jump to the end. Heroes are often impulsive sorts, and if they're given a map to follow that they can figure out, there's little reason not to take alternate routes or shortcuts. Most often following this advice boils down to "you can't go there"; good reasons for this in-game include incomplete directions ("travel five miles east from the rock that's shaped like a fist" isn't too helpful if you don't know where that rock is) and an actual need to retrace the route taken ("Along the way I devised a contingency plan where I hid five portions of the amulet of power . . .").

The route needs to be evocative. Again, pirate treasure maps fail here (in my mind), since they don't promise much in

the way of adventure along the way. If the heroes feel like they're going to encounter nothing but tedium along the way, they might be tempted to try to jump ahead, outsource the dull bits, or otherwise "cheat." Ideally they'll feel like they have an inside edge in the final encounter(s) that others don't because they're following a route (akin to the protagonist of *Indiana Jones & The Last Crusade*).

The players should be comfortably uncomfortable following the route. This is true for mosey mysteries; the players should hopefully be intrigued enough to want to continue but not so frustrated that they can't. If nothing else, having the heroes following a source with lots of appendices or addendums can allow for additional clues to be introduced if necessary, or the stops along the way can offer more clues than originally planned. (When in doubt, have thugs burst in and say, "We're here to stop you from going on the Zebra Sheep Bridge, since we *know* that must be where you intend on going next!")

Remember your time scales. This can be a difficult one to get right, but remember that retracing someone's steps is different from more generalized clues. The more time passes, the greater the possible sense of mystery (since this great mystery has gone undiscovered for a longer period), but also creates a possibility of disbelief because the trail can remain more difficult to follow. Landmarks change, and can be moved, altered, or deleted; clues witnessed or left behind can be discovered or destroyed by others. (Of course it can be a great sub-adventure for the heroes to attempt to find out what happened to the Foobar of Finding that was *supposed* to be hidden in the old book of the library . . .)

Try to make sure others couldn't accidentally follow the trail. This one usually takes care of itself; in the case of a journal, there's little reason why someone else would take the exact path of the author (unless they're connected with or acting against that person, of course). But in the event that the trail creator is following an observable enough phenomenon, it seems possible that others might have moved along the same path, potentially making that portion more difficult to follow. (For example, if the journal writer witnesses a winged creature flying off with a townsperson, why weren't there other people chasing that event?) If the creator of the "breadcrumbs" has had a serious impact on the lands visited or witnessed a large enough phenomenon, then it's probably best to address why he wasn't followed or remembered.

End the journal (or whatever) evocatively. Nothing gets the heroes following the trail more than a final entry that goes something like, "If this is the last entry, then I have failed" or "I believe I have learned enough along the way to defeat the Great Evil. Tomorrow I shall know if I was correct."

Adventures often but the PCs in situations where they are blazing new trails and venturing off in bold, new directions. But perhaps a more evocative tale begins with going where one person has gone before . . . only, you don't know how that tale turned out.

--Steven Marsh

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Icosahedron Adventures

A Cache of Cantrips

by Owen K. C. Stephens

One of the most popular kinds of supplements for *d20 System* fantasy rules is new spell collections. Designed to fill out spells of a particular theme or region, these books and articles generally have a good mix of 1st- through 9th-level spells. What they almost universally lack are any significant number of 0-level spells (also called cantrips). As a result, no matter how different spellcasters are once they begin to reach mid-level, low-level spellcasters have the same limited options when it comes to cantrips. To give low-level characters more options (and widen the possibilities when creating cheap magic items based on 0-level spells), this article presents an assortment of nothing but 0-level cantrip spells.

Some of these cantrips are based on obvious gaps in existing cantrip lists (there are 0-level spells that deal acid and cold damage, but there isn't one to deal fire damage, a much more common energy type; you can detect poison, but not disease). Others are based on popular ideas for low-level spellcasters of various specialties (with *create creeper,* a 1st-level necromancer can have an undead cat to do his bidding). All are designed to be significantly less powerful than even minor 1st-level spells, without being so limited no one ever uses them. Many are designed for a very specific situation, but unlike higher-level spells this isn't really a weakness in design. Few spellcasters actually use all their 0-level spells in a day, so having one or two set aside for unusual situations isn't as much of a strain on resources as a 3rd-level spell you rarely get to cast.

Even so, the broader collection of cantrips may call for a few rules changes if a GM wants them to see more common use. A feat that allows anyone to know three 0-level spells (each to be cast once per day at 1st caster level) allows characters to "dabble" in spells for magic-heavy settings. A rule allowing two cantrips to be prepared in the space of a single higher-level spell increases flexibility without boosting firepower of spellcasters. Finally, the simple act of allowing spellcaster to gain additional castings per day of cantrips for high ability score modifiers allows spellcasters to be increasingly relaxed about minor spells as they gain higher levels.

Bard Cantrips

- **Bell.** Place an alarm on a moving closure. (F)
- **Eye Spy.** Relocate your point of view.
- **Good Cheer.** Grant a +2 bonus to your next Diplomacy check.
- **Nerves.** One target with 4 HD or less is shaken.
- **Pelt.** Throw conjured fruit to deal 1d4 points of nonlethal damage.
- **Reprieve.** Next target to attack you must make Will save to do so.
- **Summon Monster 0.** Summon minor extraplanar creature to aid you.
- **To Arms!** Nearby allies are not flat footed.

Cleric Cantrips

- **Create Creeper.** Turn one dead animal into a minor undead.
- **Deflect.** Ready to turn away a ranged attack.
- **Detect Disease.** Locate diseased or infectious creatures and items.
- **Lifewatch.** Know the condition of a few visible allies.
- **Reload.** Reload one ranged weapon.
- **Reprieve.** Next target to attack you must make Will save to do so.
- **Summon Monster 0.** Summon minor extraplanar creature to aid you.
- **Temporary Creation.** Briefly create small, cheap, handheld item of vegetable material.

- **Warn.** Caution foe against a particular course of action.

Druid Cantrips

- **Detect Companions, Familiars and Steeds** Find lost allies.
- **Entwine.** Fire a net-like mass of vines at one Medium or smaller target.
- **Jolt.** Deal 1 point of electrical damage to one or more adjacent targets.
- **Pelt.** Throw conjured fruit to deal 1d4 points of nonlethal damage.
- **Quiet Manger.** Put 3 HD of animals to sleep.
- **Smouldering Fang.** Natural weapon deals 1 additional point of fire damage.

Sorcerer/Wizard Cantrips

Abjuration

- **Bell.** Place an alarm on a moving closure. (F)
- **Deflect.** Ready to turn away a ranged attack.

Conjuration

- **Mage Buckler.** Create a small shield of force that grants a +1 shield bonus to AC.
- **Pelt.** Throw conjured fruit to deal 1d4 points of nonlethal damage.
- **Summon Monster 0.** Summon minor extraplanar creature to aid you.

Divination

- **Detect Companions, Familiars and Steeds** Find lost allies.
- **Detect Disease.** Locate diseased or infectious creatures and items.
- **Eye Spy.** Relocate your point of view.

Enchantment

- **To Arms!** Nearby allies are not flat footed.

Evocation

- **Disarm.** Strike at a held object with a wave of force.
- **Flame Puff.** Create a 5-ft. diameter ball of flame that deals 1d4 points of damage.
- **Jolt.** Deal 1 point of electrical damage to one or more adjacent targets.

Necromancy

- **Create Creeper.** Turn one dead animal into a minor undead.
- **Nerves.** One target with 4 HD or less is shaken.

Transmutation

- **Reload.** Reload one ranged weapon.
- **Smouldering Weapon.** Weapon deals 1 additional point of fire damage.

Spell Descriptions

Bell

Abjuration

Level: Brd 0, Sor/Wiz 0
Components: V, S, F
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Touch
Target: One door, chest lid or similar closure
Duration: 10 minutes/level (D)
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No

This spell is cast upon a movable closure of no more than Medium size, such as a door, chest lid, cabinet door, or even the drawstring of a purse. Whenever this closure is opened by anyone other than you the spell produces the sound of a hand bell, and anyone within 60 feet of the warded closure can hear it clearly. Reduce the distance by 10 feet for each interposing closed door and by 20 feet for each substantial interposing wall. In quiet conditions, the ringing can be heard faintly as far as 180 feet away. The sound lasts for 1 round.

The spell is not set off by creatures passing through the closure without opening it, touching the closure, or even bypassing it (such as by cutting a whole in a nearby wall, or cutting the bottom of a purse).

Focus: A tiny bell

Create Creeper

Necromancy [Evil]

Level: Clr 0, Sor/Wiz 0
Components: V, S, M
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Touch
Targets: One animal corpse touched
Duration: Instantaneous
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No

This spell turns the bones or body of a dead animal into a HD undead zombie that follows your spoken commands. The undead can follow you, or remain in an area and attack any creature (or just a specific kind of creature) entering the place. It remains animated until it is destroyed. (A destroyed zombie can't be animated again.)

The undead you create remain under your control indefinitely. No matter how many times you use this spell, however, you can control only 4 undead creatures created by this spell at once. If you exceed this number, the newly created creature falls under your control, and one excess undead from a previous casting become uncontrolled. (You choose which creature is released.) If you are a cleric, any undead you might command by virtue of your power to command or rebuke undead do not count toward the limit. Each creeper you control through this spell counts as one HD of undead toward the limit of creatures you can control with the *animate dead* spell.

Material Component: You must place a black onyx gem worth at least 15 gp per corpse you intend to animate. The magic of the spell turns these gems into worthless, burned-out shells.

Deflect

Abjuration

Level: Clr 0, Sor/Wiz 0 **Components:** V, S **Casting Time:** 1 standard action **Range:** Close (25 ft. +5 ft./2 levels)
Effect: One ranged weapon attack deflected **Duration:** Instantaneous **Saving Throw:** None **Spell Resistance:** No

For this spell to be useful, you must ready an action to cast it in response to a ranged weapon attack made by an opponent. The target of the ranged attack must be within this spell's range. When you cast the spell as a readied action in this way, you make a Spellcraft check opposed by the attacker's attack roll. If you win this opposed check, the attack misses.

This spell has no effect on magical attack, or unusually massive attacks such as siege weapons or thrown boulders.

Detect Companions, Familiars and Steeds

Divination

Level: Drd 0, Pal 1, Rgr 1, Sor/Wiz 0
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)
Area: Cone-shaped emanation
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 min./level (D)
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No

You can detect the presence of an animal companion, familiar or paladin's steed of your own. If you cast this spell while touching up to six willing targets, you can also detect any animal companions, familiars or steeds of theirs. The detection is a cone emanating out from you in whatever direction you face. The amount of information revealed depends on how long you search a particular area or focus on a specific kind of animal or plant.

1st Round: Presence or absence of companions, familiars or steeds in the area.

2nd Round: Number of companions, familiars or steeds in the area, and the condition of the healthiest specimen.

3rd Round: The condition (see below) and location of each individual companion, familiar or steed. If a companion, familiar or steed is outside your line of sight, then you discern its direction but not its exact location.

Conditions: For purposes of this spell, the categories of condition are as follows:

- Normal: Has at least 90% of full normal hit points, free of disease.
- Fair: 30% to 90% of full normal hit points remaining.
- Poor: Less than 30% of full normal hit points remaining, afflicted with a disease, or suffering from a debilitating injury.
- Weak: 0 or fewer hit points remaining, afflicted with a disease in the terminal stage, or crippled.

If a creature falls into more than one category, the spell indicates the weaker of the two.

Each round you can turn to detect in a new area. The spell can penetrate barriers, but 1 foot of stone, 1 inch of common metal, a thin sheet of lead, or 3 feet of wood or dirt blocks it.

Detect Disease

Divination

Level: Clr 0, Drd 0, Pal 1, Rgr 1
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)
Target or Area: One creature, one object, or a 5-ft. cube
Duration: Instantaneous
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No

You determine whether a creature, object, or area has been diseased or is infectious. You can determine the exact type of disease with a DC 20 Wisdom check. A character with the Heal skill may try a DC 20 Heal check if the Wisdom check fails, or may try the Craft Heal check prior to the Wisdom check.

The spell can penetrate barriers, but 1 foot of stone, 1 inch of common metal, a thin sheet of lead, or 3 feet of wood or dirt blocks it.

Disarm

Evocation [Force]

Level: Sor/Wiz 0
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Close (25 ft. +5 ft./2 levels)
Target: One creature
Duration: Instantaneous
Saving Throw: Reflex negates
Spell Resistance: Yes

You attempt to disarm a creature with a sudden blast of force. You make a ranged touch attack to effect a target. Then you make a Spellcraft check opposed by an attack roll by your target, using the item you are attempting to disarm. If the item is held with two hands, the target gains a +4 bonus to this roll. If your roll matches or beats you target's roll, the item is dropped at the target's feet.

Entwine

Transmutation

Level: Drd 0
Components: V, S, DF
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)
Target: One Medium or smaller target
Duration: 1 round/level (max 5 rounds) (D)
Saving Throw: Reflex negates
Spell Resistance: Yes

You fire a clump of twisting, writhing vines at the target, making a ranged attack roll. If the roll succeeds, the target must make a Reflex save or be entangled as if struck by a weak net (with no trailing rope). An entangled creature takes a -2 penalty on attack rolls and a -4 penalty on Dexterity, can move at only half speed, and cannot charge or run. If the

entangled creature attempts to cast a spell, it must make a DC 15 Concentration check or be unable to cast the spell.

A creature entangled by your *entwine* spell can escape with a DC 15 Escape Artist check (a full-round action). The vines have 5 hit points and can be burst with a DC 20 Strength check (also a full-round action).

Eye Spy

Divination

Level: Brd 0, Sor/Wiz 0
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Close (25 ft. +5 ft./2 levels)
Effect: Magical sensor
Duration: 1 round
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No

This spell allows you to create an immobile magical sensor at some point within range to which you has line of effect. The sensor can be placed in mid-air at some point that has line of sight when you do not, allowing you to see around corners or into small spaces. For the duration of the spell, your vision originates at the point of the magical sensor, rather than your own eyes. You can use all your natural vision enhancements (such as low-light vision), but the spell does not allow vision enhanced through other spells or magic items.

Flame Puff

Evocation (Fire)

Level: Sor/Wiz 0
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)
Area: 5 ft. diameter
Duration: Instantaneous
Saving Throw: Reflex half
Spell Resistance: Yes

With a gesture you cause a single five-foot space to be briefly consumed by a tiny puff of flame. Creatures in the area take 1d4 points of fire damage. The flame is so brief it fails to set anything alight, even highly flammable items such as oil-soaked rags.

Good Cheer

Enchantment

Level: Brd 0, Sor/Wiz 0
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Personal
Target: You
Duration: 10 min./level
Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

You cover yourself in an aura of friendly, cheerful energy. This gives you some benefit when dealing with thinking creatures. The next Diplomacy check you make during the duration of the spell gains a +2 circumstance bonus. This only applies to checks made with creatures with an Intelligence of 6 or higher. Once you have made a Diplomacy check, the spell ends.

Jolt

Evocation (Electricity)

Level: Drd 0, Sor/Wiz 0
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: 5 ft.
Targets: Up to one creature or object per level (max 8 targets)
Duration: Instantaneous
Saving Throw: Reflex negates
Spell Resistance: Yes

You crackle with electricity, and tiny bolts of lightning streak out to strike targets within 5 feet of you. Creatures struck take 1 point of damage, which is negated by a successful Reflex save.

Lifewatch

Divination

Level: Clr 0
Components: V, S, DF
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Touch
Targets: Up to six willing creatures touched
Duration: 10 min./level
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No

You cast this spell by touching all willing creatures to be involved. For the duration of the spell, when you look at one of these targets you automatically know the condition of that target. You must be able to see the target clearly. While this spell does not normally require any time to determine the condition of a target, a GM may require you to make a Spot check if vision conditions are not optimal.

Conditions: For purposes of this spell, the categories of condition are as follows:

- Normal: Has at least 90% of full normal hit points, free of disease.
- Fair: 30% to 90% of full normal hit points remaining.
- Poor: Less than 30% of full normal hit points remaining, afflicted with a disease, or suffering from a debilitating injury.
- Weak: 0 or fewer hit points remaining, afflicted with a disease in the terminal stage, or crippled.

If a creature falls into more than one category, the spell indicates the weaker of the two.

Mage Buckler

Conjuration (Creation) [Force]

Level: Sor/Wiz 0
Components: V, S, F
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Personal
Target: Caster
Duration: 1 minute/level (D)
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No

An invisible but tangible field of force hovers near you, blocking incoming attacks and providing you a +1 shield bonus to AC. Unlike a mundane shield, *mage buckler* entails no armor check penalty, arcane spell failure chance, or speed reduction. Since *mage buckler* is made of force, incorporeal creatures can't bypass it the way they do a normal shield.

Focus: A piece of a shield strap.

Nerves

Necromancy [Fear, Mind-Affecting]

Level: Brd 0, Sor/Wiz 0
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)
Target: One humanoid creature of 4 HD or less
Duration: 1 round/2 levels
Saving Throw: Will negates
Spell Resistance: Yes

You send a cloud of unease at the mind of a humanoid creature with 4 or fewer Hit Dice so that it is shaken. Humanoids of 5 or more HD are not affected.

Pelt

Conjuration [Creation]

Level: Brd 0, Drd 0, Sor/Wiz 0
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)
Target: One creature/object
Duration: Instantaneous
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: Yes

A large, hard, rotten fruit projects from your pointing finger. You must succeed on a ranged touch attack with the fruit to deal damage to a target. The fruit deals 1d4 points of nonlethal damage. The damage from the fruit acts like weapon damage, and can be reduced by damage reduction.

Quiet Manger

Enchantment (Compulsion) [Mind-Affecting]

Level: Drd 0
Components: V, S, DF
Casting Time: 1 round
Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)
Area: One or more living animals within a 10-ft.-radius burst
Duration: 1 minute
Saving Throw: Will negates
Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell causes a magical slumber to come upon 3 Hit Dice of animals. Animals with the fewest HD are affected first. Among animals with equal HD, those who are closest to the spell's point of origin are affected first. Hit Dice that are not sufficient to affect an animal are wasted.

Sleeping animals are helpless. Slapping or wounding awakens an affected animal, but normal noise does not. Awakening an animal is a standard action (an application of the aid another action).

Reload

Transmutation

Level: Clr 0, Sor/Wiz 0
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Touch
Effect: One ranged weapon reloads
Duration: Instantaneous
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No

When you touch a willing target that has an unloaded ranged weapon, and ammunition for that weapon, the weapon automatically reloads one round of ammunition.

Reprieve

Abjuration

Level: Brd 0, Clr 0
Components: V, S, DF
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Personal
Target: You
Duration: 1 round/level
Saving Throw: Will negates
Spell Resistance: No

The next opponent attempting to strike or otherwise directly attack you, even with a targeted spell, must attempt a Will save. If the save succeeds, the opponent can attack you normally. If the save fails, the opponent can't follow through with the attack, that part of its action is lost. This spell does not prevent you from being attacked or affected by area or effect spells. You cannot attack without breaking the spell but may use nonattack spells or otherwise act. Once a single attack has been directed against you the spell, ends, whether it stopped that attack or not.

Smouldering Fang

Transmutation

Level: Drd 0
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Touch
Target: Creature touched
Duration: 1 round/level
Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless, object)
Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless, object)

This spell causes one natural weapon to deal an additional 1d3 points of fire damage on successful attacks. (This effect is negated if the natural weapon already deals acid, cold, electricity, fire or sonic damage for any reason.) The spell can affect a slam attack, fist, bite, or other natural weapon. (The spell does not change an unarmed strike's damage from nonlethal damage to lethal damage.)

Smouldering Weapon

Transmutation

Level: Sor/Wiz 0
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Touch
Target: Weapon touched
Duration: 1 round/level
Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless, object)
Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless, object)

This spell causes a weapon to deal an additional 1d3 points of fire damage on successful attacks. (This effect is negated if the weapon already deals acid, cold, electricity, fire or sonic damage for any reason.) You can't cast this spell on a natural weapon, such as an unarmed strike (instead, see *smoldering fang*). A monk's unarmed strike is considered a weapon, and thus it can be enhanced by this spell.

Summon Monster 0

Conjuration (Summoning) [see text]

Level: Brd 0, Clr 0, Sor/Wiz 0
Components: V, S, F/DF
Casting Time: 1 round
Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)
Effect: One summoned creature
Duration: 1 round/level (5 rounds max)(D)
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No

This spell summons an extraplanar creature (typically an outsider, elemental, or magical beast native to another plane). It appears where you designate and acts immediately, on your turn. It attacks your opponents to the best of its ability. If you can communicate with the creature, you can direct it not to attack, to attack particular enemies, or to perform other

actions.

The spell conjures one of the creatures from the 0-level list on the accompanying Summon Monster table. You choose which kind of creature to summon, and you can change that choice each time you cast the spell.

A summoned monster cannot summon or otherwise conjure another creature, nor can it use any teleportation or planar travel abilities. Creatures cannot be summoned into an environment that cannot support them.

When you use a summoning spell to summon an air, chaotic, earth, evil, fire, good, lawful, or water creature, it is a spell of that type.

Arcane Focus: A tiny bag and a small (not necessarily lit) candle.

Summon Monster, 0-Level

- Celestial lizard LG
- Celestial toad NG
- Celestial weasel NG
- Celestial cat CG
- Fiendish rat LE
- Fiendish monstrous centipede, tiny NE
- Fiendish toad NE
- Fiendish snake, tiny viper CE

Temporary Creation

Conjuration (Creation)

Level: Clr 0
Components: V, S, DF
Casting Time: 1 full round
Range: 0 ft.
Effect: Unattended, nonmagical object of nonliving plant matter, up to 1 cu. ft.
Duration: 1 round/level (D)
Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

You create a nonmagical, unattended object of nonliving, vegetable matter with a gold piece value of no more than 10gp. The volume of the item created cannot exceed 1 cubic foot. You must succeed on an appropriate skill check to make a complex item. If the created object leaves your hand, it instantly disappears. Attempting to use any created object as a material component causes the spell to fail.

To Arms!

Enchantment

Level: Brd 0, Sor/Wiz 0
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: 0
Area: 10 ft./level radius
Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No

When you cast this spell, all your allies within its area cease to be flat-footed against any foe.

Warn

Enchantment (Compulsion) [Language-Dependent, Mind-Affecting]

Level: Clr 0
Components: V
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)
Target: One living creature
Duration: 1 round
Saving Throw: Will negates
Spell Resistance: Yes

You give the subject a single warning, advising it not to take a particular course of action. If the target takes the action you advise against on its next round, it suffers a minor penalty. You may select from the following options for your warning.

Action: You may warn the target from taking any action that requires a specific skill check. If the target takes an action requiring that skill on its next round, it suffers a -2 penalty.

Attack: If the target makes an attack on its next round, it suffers a -2 penalty to its first attack roll.

Cast: If the target casts a spell on its next round, it must make a DC 10 Concentration check to successfully cast the spell. If it is already required to make a concentration check (to cast defensively, for example), it takes a -1 penalty to that skill check.

Move: If the target takes a double move on its next round, its movement rate is reduced by 5 ft. (resulting in a total of 10 feet less movement over the course of a double move).

The Wight Stuff

for *d20 System*

by William Blake Smith

"Trembling he looked up, in time to see a tall dark figure like a shadow against the stars. It leaned over him. He thought there were two eyes, very cold though lit with a pale light that seemed to come from some remote distance. Then a grip stronger and colder than iron seized him. The icy touch froze his bones, and he remembered no more . . . a Barrow-wight had taken him, and he was probably already under the dreadful spells of the Barrow-wights about which whispered tales spoke."
--J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

"Wights are undead creatures given a semblance of life through sheer violence and hatred."
--Dungeons & Dragons Monster Manual 3.5

If you are a GM running a *d20 System* game and you're setting up an adventure for your players, this may have happened to you. You think to yourself, "What should I put in the cemetery for them to fight?" You look at your notes and find that you've got four third-level characters so you look for something that has an encounter level to match that, and is appropriate for the setting. You see that wights are CR-3, and without thinking much about it you throw a couple of them into the crypt where old Lord MacGuffin's treasure is rumored to be stored.

By putting wights out as random EL or CR based "dungeon dressing" you may be missing an opportunity to make this powerful and dangerous creature something your PCs will dread, and your players will remember and speak of in hushed whispers. Once you delve into the mechanics described in the 3.5 and SRD documentation, you may find yourself questioning how accurate that CR-3 really is.

Let's get one thing out of the way right up front. The word "wight" does not mean "zombie." Wight comes from the Old English word "wight" meaning "creature" or "thing." The name of Tolkien's maleficent creation really means "grave-creature," or "tomb-thing," or depending on your translation could even be as benign as "tomb-person." This nomenclature issue was included in the *AD&D Monster Manual,* but people introduced to Wights through the 3.5 version of *d20 System* will not see this mentioned in the creature's description.

If *The Fellowship of the Ring* can be considered the source material for the wight, the game monster varies greatly from its literary ancestor. Though the hobbits face many terrors early in their travels, the evil thing that lurks in the barrow is a terrifying encounter that they barely escape. But what is a wight? Well, in Tolkien's text it was a thing of evil and it lived in a grave. It resembled a ghoul in its choice of homes, and behaved somewhat like a vampire in its ability to mesmerize living. It bore a list of powerful spells, the nature of which is not revealed to us in the book; but one may safely assume they were not healing spells.

d20 System wights are illustrated and described as silent-moving undead creatures with huge claws and evil intent. As a brief historical gaming note, a few things have changed with the wight from the *AD&D Monster Manual* to the *Monster Manual 3.5.* The 2nd edition wight used to be found in packs running up to 16. It also shunned the light, and could be destroyed with a *raise dead* spell. The 3.5 wight is described as being encountered as solitary beings or in packs up to 11 in number, and like all of the undead creatures in the 3.5, the words "undead traits" are written in the stat-block. Pay attention to those words; we'll get back to them in a moment.

The wight has a slam attack, plus an energy drain that causes a negative level gain. Every time that slam successfully hits a character, they risk having another level drained. Every successful level-drain decreases the character's abilities and increases the chance that they'll be hit again. The wight gains 5 temporary hit points with each successful level drain, and this is added to its own hit points which average around 26 (based off 4d12). These temporary hits won't change a wight's "natural" hit point level, but can raise a wight's hit points to dangerous levels if the tide of battle turns

in the wight's favor.

Another thing about wights that you don't hear much about is how quiet they are. They get a +8 on their "move silently" checks. This gives them a +16 to moving around stealthily, before the GM rolls the die for their efforts. That's a very quiet, evil, hate-filled entity silently stalking through the shadow places.

So they're dangerous enough with their special abilities, but because they have "undead traits" many of the normal tactics that a party of adventurers would use to kill these beasts won't work. Wights have darkvision, immunity to all mind spells, immunity to poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, disease, critical hits, non-lethal damage, ability drain, level drain, fatigue, and exhaustion. They don't eat. They don't sleep. They don't even need to breathe. They're intelligent, hate all life, and are completely evil. Does this still sound like a CR-3?

Anybody killed by a wight becomes a wight (under control of the wight that slew them) in 1d4 rounds. In the *d20 System* a round of combat lasts 6 seconds. So every person slain in combat by wights will rise as wights themselves in 6 to 24 seconds.

Consider how weak and pathetic most NPCs are, and you'll see what a perilous situation wights create in an urban environment. According to the *Player's Handbook,* the commoner NPC has d4 hit points. A warrior NPC has d8 hit points. As little as one or two hits from a wight will kill NPCs of this caliber. Then, those dead NPCs will become a full-powered wight in 6 to 24 seconds.

Let us consider a scenario for a moment. Evil Lothario is a bad man. He likes to hurt people. He hates beauty. He spits in the well. He steals from the poor. He doesn't pay his taxes, and he wears white shoes after Labor Feast. After living a short, bitter life of loathing he passes away and is given a pauper's funeral in the local cemetery. Nobody comes to his funeral but the grave-digger, and nobody sees Lothario the wight burst from the coffin while he is being interred. Nobody even hears the grave-digger's screams, or the sound of him rising up from the ground as a second wight 12 seconds later.

The grave-digger's wife comes out to find him when he doesn't come home for dinner. Two rounds of screaming later, and then an additional 24 seconds and there are three wights in the graveyard. Now here is where it gets interesting. If the three of them work together, they can break into The Miller's house. His family won't hear them come in, because as wights they all move more silently than cats. The three of them slam attack the family in their beds, and soon the Miller and his five kids join the wight army.

The nine of them head down to the docks where the drunken sailors are drinking and singing in the Cracked Tankard Tavern. As the sailors intermittently make their way back to the ship, shadows reach out of the foggy night and slam them into silence. In half of an hour, there are enough wights to make a full assault on the Cracked Tankard. Many leave the tavern that night, but none of them are human anymore. In less than six hours with just simple, methodical, and relatively slow attack-plan Lothario the wight has made friends (slaves) out of well over 50 townsmen. And that is a very conservative number.

So why aren't wights the most commonly encountered creatures in *d20 System* worlds? Here are a few suggestions on how you might answer that question in your gaming world:

- **Wight Supremists:** Handle wights like what they are -- an animated and intelligent virus. They are more dangerous than the plague, and wherever they spring up armies should be dispatched to burn infected cities to the ground, perform holy ceremonies, quarantine, and destroy sites that might house the evil beasts. Think *Night of the Living Dead* meets *28 Days Later,* only make it grim.
- **Pyramid Scheme:** Change the rules for wights in your game world to make them less virulent. One method is to create a situation where the main wight can spawn second-tier wights, and they in turn spawn third tier -- but each lower rank has less power. A simple way to do this is to have each subsequent tier of wight from the "prime" wight deliver one less point of HP draining with each successful slam, so that a 6th-tier wight couldn't drain energy and therefore couldn't spawn a new wight. That still leaves the wights as very powerful foes. If you add to this mix a house-rule stating that if the "prime" wight is eliminated, all his spawn will die then you'll accomplish two things. First, you'll make the wights more manageable by the PCs. Second, you'll give the

players a clear objective and possibly introduce some interesting tactics for dealing with these creatures.

- **The Wight to Bear Arms:** Sometimes hate spurs people to do terrible things. In others it spurs them to avoid people and shun contact. Make your wights evil, moody, intelligent and very anti-social. Your wights don't take over the world because they hate other wights too! They don't want more wights, and if at all possible will use a weapon rather than their slam attack to kill you so that none are spawned.
- **Holy Ground:** Have the church(es) handle wight propagation by ensuring that wherever possible, all burials are in holy ground. Each death is accompanied by a visit from local priests, and a blessing during the funeral rites. It doesn't matter if the deceased wasn't religious. In fact, the grieving family of the agnostic may find several forceful priests coming to the death-bed regardless of protests. If you're a GM introducing wights into your game, have several sessions where the elaborate burial rituals are observed and are pointed out to have always been a part of the culture for as long as the characters can remember. Then have a war break out and/or a plague as well. The vast numbers of unburied dead and unconsecrated mass graves for those who did get buried serve as a Petri-dish of evil.
- **Property Wights:** Wights usually live in graveyards. Your wights might not like to live anywhere else. Or, more importantly, they may have their numbers kept in check by other evil or undead creatures who don't want to encourage heroes to come and plunder the place. Perhaps a local vampire wipes them out if they get too numerous. Or perhaps they are the thralls of a powerful lich, and it keeps them on a very tight metaphorical leash. Whatever the reason, your wights are homebodies; very dangerous homebodies.
- **Wight Fight:** Another alternative to limit wight power would be that after a "prime" wight is slain, his first tier of created wights become free to start their own "line" of wights, and at that point can war between themselves and the other peers in their tier. Such bitter rivalries would allow the wights to limit their own numbers through in-fighting, and some of these tiers might exodus out to new territory to avoid being exterminated by their former co-slaves.

For the GM, these are a few ideas for how you can use wights, and a reminder that they're not just some low-level dungeon fodder if you use them properly. If you're running a classic-style *d20 System* module as the GM, it is easy to get into the mindset of trying to set up challenges for the players based on encounter-level to "flesh out" your dungeon, tomb or maze. Trying these variations out on your players might surprise them, and might even change your world.

And if you're a player and want to protect your PC, always ensure there is a cleric in your party. Wights may be your character's first exposure to negative levels, and if you're not careful they can be your last. On the bright side, if the cleric can't save you, and your party's skills can't overcome the onslaught of these silent killers, in the end your party will be all wight.

"Get out you old Wight! Vanish in the Sunlight"
J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Countermancy

A School Of Magick for *Unknown Armies*

by Ryan P. Macklin

You know the horror of the magick. It makes slaves of people, consumes them, and turns them into monsters that bring reality crashing down on the innocent. You understand their power, and use it against them. If you must become the monster to fight the monster, so be it.

For every person who is successfully brainwashed -- "trained" -- by an adept, there are a hundred students who "fail," and get ditched for the next punk who might have "an open mind." These poor souls are left battered and broken, having stared into the abyss and lost their minds, their souls. They're left unable to function in the real world, useless to the occult underground, and have nothing to show for it but a look of disappointment and pity.

You were almost one of those. When you stared into the abyss and saw it staring back, you didn't smile with newfound insight, nor did you cower or let yourself be consumed. You screamed "NO!" with every ounce of your being. Your mentor ditched you, but you didn't become another victim. You stood up, recognized the horror for what it was, and lashed out.

The Unnatural is anathema. You learned how to fight it, how to stop it, but to do so you had to become it. It doesn't matter anymore you can't ignore what you saw or try to pretend it didn't change you. The only alternative is to live as a broken shell. If you must become a monster to fight monsters, you'll drag as many of them down to Hell with you as you can.

The central paradox of Countermancy is using the unnatural to stop the unnatural. You are friend and foe to the occult underground at the same time. They're the only ones who can understand and accept you and your "curse," but they're also the ones you're fighting.

Countermancy Blast Style

Countermancers (also known in the occult underground as "buzzkills") don't have a blast. Instead, they have an "anti-blast" -- a spell that undoes the effects of a blast spell. This takes the form of a miraculous recovery when the damage isn't obvious to an outside observer. When there is visible physical damage, then the person recovers rapidly, but not unnaturally or alarmingly so. Dead people cannot be affected by an anti-blast.

If someone is hit with a blast and anti-blast at the same time, the blast is reduced or completely neutralized. A significant anti-blast will neutralize any blast. A minor anti-blast will neutralize a minor blast and reduce a significant blast into hand-to-hand damage.

Anti-blasts cannot be done with tainted charges (see Generating Tainted Charges below).

Stats

Countermancers must pick the school their teacher attempted to pass on, which may be any school except Countermancy. This is known as their Affinity School. Record this alongside the skill name: "Magic: Countermancy (Entropomancy) 55%".

Buzzkills also have at least two Hardened and two Failed Unnatural notches, rather than the standard one.

Generate a Minor Charge: Live the "normal" life. Every 24 hours spent without contact with magick or the

Unnatural generates a minor charge for a buzzkill, as long as he is able to keep magick out of his thoughts as well. Every day that the Countermancer remains abstinent from magick and the Unnatural, the GM secretly rolls against the buzzkill's Magick skill without flip-flopping or shifts. On a success, his inherent magick blocked the chare from forming. On a failure, he gains a charge -- but he doesn't know about it until he checks on his charges, which ruins his charge for that day. There are no additional effects for matches or critical successes or failures.

Countermancers can also gain tainted minor charges from their affinity school. See "Generating Tainted Charges."

Generate a Significant Charge: Stop an adept from gaining a charge, disrupt a charge ritual, or force a charged-up adept to break taboo. The Countermancer does not have to be the direct cause of the disruption. He could have a dipsomancer thrown out of a bar by talking to the bouncer, instead of slapping the drink out of his hand, but he must have instigated the disruption.

The buzzkill cannot gain any more charges from the same adept during the next hour. Since the adept can still try for more charges, the wise Countermancer subdues his target or gets the Hell out of Dodge.

The biggest drawback to intervening (aside from the lethality involved in getting between an adept and his charge) is that the Countermancer cannot stage it. He must truly be stopping an adept for the sake of keeping magick at bay, not to accumulate power himself. Others may stage this and trick him into getting a charge but he must fully believe in the act.

Countermancers can also gain tainted significant charges from their affinity school. See "Generating Tainted Charges."

Generate a Major Charge: Disrupt an adept from your affinity school from gaining a major charge, or force him to break taboo while he's holding the charge.

Countermancers cannot gain tainted major charges from their affinity school.

Generating Tainted Charges: Buzzkills who need power in a hurry can gain minor or significant charges by following the rituals for their affinity school. This is a dangerous, desperate act. First, any non-tainted (or "clean") charges he has are immediately lost since participating in a charge ritual breaks taboo. He cannot gain any more clean charges until he's rid himself of all the tainted ones and spends three days away living a normal life, as if generating minor charges. Gaining a tainted charge is a deliberate act -- a Countermancer of Plutomancy doesn't get a charge everyone he receives money, only when he does so with the intent of gaining a charge.

That's the good news. Tainted charges cause severe problems for those who utterly reject the Unnatural. The Countermancer suffers a negative shift on every stat and skill while holding the charge, -10% if only holding minor charges, -25% if holding any significant charges as him soul is rejecting the charge like a bad implant. This doesn't end until the adept loses all the tainted charges. Because of this, these charges are unstable. When using tainted charges, they are spent every time a spell is attempted, even if the Magick roll fails.

Regardless of whether the charges he is carrying are clean or tainted, he can only fuel Countermancy spells with them.

Taboo: Countermancers have two taboos. First, they may not be a willing participant in an unnatural effect, magick spell (aside from their own Countermancy spells) or ritual. Only clean charges are lost when breaking this taboo. Buzzkills may partake in the company of adepts and their ilk without breaking the taboo (if they can stomach each other in the first place), but that's as far as it goes.

Second -- and here's the kicker -- they share the same taboo as their affinity school. There is enough of an imprint of his former teacher's school that he is bound by those rules. This is a never-ending source of frustration for buzzkills. Breaking this taboo affects both normal and tainted charges.

Random Magick Domain: The cosmic status quo reinforcement of the Natural. Strange noises in your home? It's just old floorboards. Get mauled by some unspeakable thing? It was just a bear, and you're recovering a lot faster. Countermancy has no effect on avatar channels avatars are the paragons of the cosmic status quo.

Starting Charges: Newly created Countermancers start with as many charges, all clean, as new adepts in their affinity school start with.

Special Effect: If the Countermancer is holding any clean charges, an adept from his affinity school who attempts to affect his with a spell has their magick roll flip-flopped if it would make the roll fail or be less effective, even if the adept flip-flopped it already. This effect works against every spell, not just harmful ones. Only running out of charges turns this off. If the spell is suppressed, the Countermancer doesn't know he did it, and the adept treats it like a normal spell failure.

When the buzzkill is charged (clean or tainted), adepts from his affinity school sense him as a malevolent force when they see him. Those who have dealt with Countermancers before knows what this means, though the message is clear enough to those less educated.

Countermancy Minor Formula Spells

Unlike other adepts, Countermancers rarely give their formula spells interesting or inspiring names. Some even go as far as to not name them at all, to avoid the idea that they're actually doing something unnatural. The names below are as inspiring as most Countermancers get.

Peace and Quiet

Cost: 1 minor charge

Effect: The Countermancer can suppress a minor unnatural phenomenon or the effects of a minor artifact within visual range for a number of minutes equal to the magick roll. If the phenomenon or effect would expire by then, it does not return.

Soul Healing

Cost: 1 minor charge

Effect: The Countermancer can cause minor charge charges to leak out of an adept by pushing one of his charges in, causing them both to cancel and disappear. He must grab the adept flesh-to-flesh and focus -- not just mere casual contact or have any clothing in the way. He can only cause one charge to be lost at a time, but can continue until there are no charges left.

Soul Healing does not affect significant charges directly, but if the target doesn't have any minor charges left, any significant charges will be converted down until there are some minor charges to lose.

This spell does not work against Countermancers with clean charges, and cannot be done using tainted charges. If the target has no charges to affect, the spell fails and the buzzkill's charge is not lost.

But Fear Itself

Cost: 2 minor charges

Effect: The target of this spell becomes immune to Unnatural madness checks. He doesn't suddenly become fearless, but ignores non-threatening effects (even If they are shoved right in his face) or rationalizes any dangers as mundane threats. This lasts for the sum of the dice, in minutes.

If the target also recently failed an Unnatural check, this works like Psychological First Aid (p. 69), by having the target forget the unnatural event or rationalize it as something mundane. While many people do this on their own, this spell makes that concrete.

Since the target saw the event differently than others (or blocked it out completely), he may be subject to Self or Isolation checks if confronted aggressively by other witnesses.

NO!

Cost: 2 minor charges

Effect: This is the Countermancer's minor anti-blast. It may be used to heal damage done by a blast spell, whether the damage was done to Wound Points, Soul, or something else. The damage healed is the sum of the dice or the amount of damage done by the blast, whichever is lower. The anti-blast cannot heal anything but the damage taken from magickal blasts. It also neutralizes a minor blast thrown at the target at the same time, and turns a significant blast into hand-to-hand damage.

If the effects of the blast are not outwardly visible (like the pornomancers' blast), the healing is instantaneous. If the effect is outwardly visible (like the epideromancers', or any blasts that direct physical threats such as the dipsomancers' or urbanomancers'), the wound points are gained back immediately, but the physical evidence remains, though it heals faster than normal (bruises fade and cuts heal faster, etc.).

Anti-blasts cannot be done with tainted charges.

Minor Counterspell

Cost: X minor charges

Effect: Disrupt a minor spell as it's being cast. The cost is the same as the cost of the spell being nullified, though the buzzkill only finds out the cost after the fact. If he doesn't have enough charges to stop it, the spell goes off as normal and he doesn't lose any charges. The target adept spends his charges, even if the spell is nullified.

Against a minor spell from his affinity school, this only costs 1 clean minor charge, regardless of the target spell's cost.

Countermancy Significant Formula Spells

I Said Shut Up!

Cost: 1 significant charge

Effect: Like Peace and Quiet, but for significant unnatural phenomena and effects from significant artifacts. You can also use this against minor unnatural phenomena and effects from minor artifacts, for a number of hours equal to the sum of the dice.

Bring Peace Unto The People

Cost: 1 significant charge

Effect: Works as But Fear Itself, but for a group of people the Countermancer can see, up to the number the dice rolled.

Reality Correction

Cost: 2 significant charges

Effect: The Countermancer can undo the effects of any minor spell that has already been cast, as long as he knows a

spell was cast, and is either in the vicinity of where the spell effect took place or knows who the caster was. The target adept does not regain his charges. For every 10 people affected or witnessing the original spell (aside from any adepts), this costs another significant charge.

Note that the longer it has been since a spell was cast, the number of people affected by countering it increases. Practical limitations are usually around one hour for very obvious spells, a day for subtle spells that actually affected someone, to a week for information-gathering spells.

The Countermancer remembers the spell having been cast, and any events based on it, rather than the altered reality. This could result in Self or Isolation checks when dealing with people remembering the past differently.

This costs one less significant charge when used against spells from his affinity school.

That Didn't Happen!

Cost: 2 significant charges

Effect: This is the Countermancer's significant anti-blast. It works like the minor anti-blast, only the damage healed is equal to the dice rolled or the damage done from blasts, whichever is lower. It also neutralizes a minor or significant blast thrown at the target at the same time.

Anti-blasts cannot be done with tainted charges.

Punish the Traitors of Reality

Cost: 4 significant charges

Effect: Adepts near the Countermancer (within 33 yards) who are holding any charges take damage as the charges explode out of them. Adepts containing only minor charges suffer damage equal to the same of the buzzkill's Magick roll, just as if hit with a minor blast. Those who are holding significant charges are affected with firearms damage, as they would be by a significant blast. The damage manifests as trauma and burns from the charges literally exploding inside their body. Bystanders near the adepts are not physically affected, though they may be shocked to see people around them suddenly convulse or die.

No one is exactly sure what happens when an adept holding a major charge is affected. Theories range from them being immune to the magical equivalent of a nuclear weapon.

Countermancers are not affected by this spell, unless they are holding tainted charges. This includes the buzzkill casting this spell, if he's holding any taint. Adepts affected may make a Magick roll to feel something wrong with their charges, and can let them go before they're damaged -- provided they actually understand what's going on.

Significant Counterspell

Cost: X significant charges

Effect: As Minor Counterspell, but for significant spells and charges.

Countermancy Major Effects

Undo any spell. Permanently nullify any artifact or an unnatural phenomenon. Cause all practitioners of a school of magick to lose their charges. Remove an adept's ability to do magick. Remove all the memories of an unnatural event.

Plot Hooks

- There's a buzzkill hunting the Freak in Chicago. They've duked it out once, and he walked away with all his body parts in the right places. He's got quite a few people in Chicago nervous.
- Rumor has it that there are a number of Countermancers working for the Sleepers, but they don't do the run-of-the-mill jobs. If you're an adept, and you kill a Sleeper, you can expect a few to hunt you down, happy to rid the world of another abomination.
- A Countermancer in Vancouver is challenging the Godwalker of the Pilgrim. Most of them don't play the avatar game, but he's hoping to ascend and make magick more difficult, if not impossible.

Pyramid Review

Dungeons & Dragons Dungeon Tiles

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Designed by Andy Collins, Jesse Decker, David Noonan, & Christopher Perkins

Art by Jason Engle

38 tiles (two 8×10 (pub & store), two 4×8 (shattered columns & boneyard), four 4×4 (pit, pool, treasure hoard, & fountain/pentagram), two 2×8 (statuary & crevasse), 12 2×4 (stairs, crevasse, and darkness), six 2×2 (spiral staircase, pit, pentagram, obelisk, & blank), eight 1×2 (portcullis & doors), two 1×1 (trap door & suit of armor); full color, mounted; $9.95

There are some products any company can put out, knowing full well that some segment of the gaming community is going to find it appealing, and one such product is dungeon floors. Why it took Wizards of the Coast so long to milk this cash cow (or, more accurately, milk it anew) isn't clear, but in a field that, in the last six months, has turned positively lousy with mapping accoutrements and programs from several companies, you have to be cautious enough to wonder if *Dungeons & Dragons Dungeon Tiles* is worth it.

Note that Wizards isn't really new to customizable layouts. They've been providing the Map-A-Week service at their website for no small length of time now, their miniatures come with their own various floor plans, and RPG history is littered with everyone's shots at creating geomorphic boards and customizable cartography. This time, the product in question is a set of cardboard-mounted tiles.

The graphics merit mention up front, since it's at least half the product anyway, and buyers won't be disappointed. Overhead illustrations are tough to get right without them looking like someone's trying to, well, draw something from a top-down perspective. These tiles are done with a light touch, each with a delicate, artistic feel suggesting the shimmer of a rune carved into the floor or the haphazard scattering of a treasure hoard. There are some misses, but most of it consumers will find pleasing. The cardboard stock is thick and ready for action, and the broader room pieces, once placed, won't shift under your figures. The longer and smaller pieces like hallways don't have the breadth and weight to hold flush to the table, but if they're sandwiched between two or more other rooms anyway, the whole layout remains stable.

The floor tiles in this set range from the generic to the fairly specific, and there's not really a unifying theme. There's the Zen of it: If you have particulars in need of satisfying, you'll have to make do with what you get. If you want generic, some of the tiles may not fit your vision. To get around some of this, the reverse of most of the tiles is printed with a simple pattern of squares with the dungeon look, so unless all your adventures occur outdoors, you can inevitably find a use for the B-side. Furthermore, those tiles that picture something other than dungeon flooring don't spoil the effect with a grid-style overlay, instead showing tiny, unobtrusive cross-marks where the squares would normally intersect. These could have been made fainter still, but the attention to detail speaks well of the set.

Like other products (say, a referee's screen) that need advertising space while they sit on the store shelf but no longer need it when you've opened them, this one has only a small, thin wraparound sheath keeping it all together. (Once they're pressed into service, storage for all those pieces is your problem . . . a gallon zip-lock baggie should do the job.) The outside is just blurbs, but the inside does have a few suggested layouts to get the juices flowing (and a pointer to

the Web where you can get more). It's also impressive to see just how big a lair you can field from what looks like such a tidy little stack of pieces.

The whole kit comes tightly packed, and this is almost a problem since the punch-out tile sets are so compacted they threaten to stick to each other and the sheath. And just because they "only almost" did it on one sample doesn't mean other copies will fare as well . . .

The choices made regarding the areas and structures pictured do cover some standard fantasy needs: stores and pubs, magic places, some ruins and pits. Smaller tiles provide the completely necessary doors, portcullises, and random rubble. Taken altogether, you may have to let the tiles dictate some of your story (just how many crevasses do you need splitting your floors in twain?), but it's still a good mix. The **Dungeons & Dragons Dungeon Tiles** idea is obviously not novel, but what you get for your money is some handsome, well-made pieces that, if you haven't the patience or money for a roll-up erasable play mat in your game, allow quick and simple dungeon construction even as players are champing at the bit for the fight to start. The only other problem with the selection, if you like what you see, is having to wait for the next set's release.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Worlds of the Dead (for [All Flesh Must Be Eaten](#))

Published by [Eden Studios, Inc.](#)

Written by Evin Ager, Rob Boyle, Thomas D. Coster, Jr., Daniel R. Davis, Gordon Dritschilo, Darren Hardy, Nik Havert, John Karakash, Michael Kvorjak, Mark Freeman, Thom Marrion, Michael McConnell, Matthew McFarland, Jason Mical, Erin Mills, W. David Pattison, Andrew Peregrine, Dan Proctor, Dan Robichaud II, Tyler Sigman, Kelly Stack, Monica Valentinelli, & Michael Wallace

Cover by Jon Hodgson

Illustrated by Storn Cook, Dwayne Harris, Travis Ingram, Dan Oropallo, & George Vasilakos

144-page b&w softcover; $24

Although not short of a Dead World or two across the whole of the *[All Flesh Must Be Eaten](#)* line, there has never been a single book devoted to the post-apocalyptic zombie-fuelled scenario. Well, if it is Dead Worlds you are want, then *Worlds of the Dead* serves them up in several brain pans awash with ideas. There are 21 on show here, all of varying length and depth and making use as a whole of nearly all the titles in the *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* line. Further, there are Dead Worlds here that reference Eden Studios Presents, the magazine devoted to the publisher's various RPGs.

These Dead Worlds take the Zombie Master across time and space, but mostly time. In this, what *Worlds of the Dead* presents is a series of alternate histories wherein the divergent factor is the appearance of the corpse cavalcade. Each Dead World follows the standard format: an opening piece of color fiction, a history, an explanation of the present situation, followed by story ideas, character ideas, the zombie stats, and perhaps an archetype or two. The book is laid out in the line's usual fashion, so it is a decent enough looking affair, although one really silly error did get past the spell check.

It opens with "Aces High: World War I" by Daniel R. Davis (with Thom Marrion and Evin Ager), in which Manfred von Richtofen, the infamous Red Baron, has become a greater scourge of the skies because he is dead and cannot die. The pilots of his Jagdgeschwader have joined him in death, while the Germans have found a way of sending zombies into the trenches. This Dead World is supported with write ups for various flying aces and aeroplanes.

Other historical Dead Worlds include Mark Freeman's "Dead Men and Derring Do" which pits the Musketeers against the horde. Roman legionaries face Pictish zombies along Hadrian's Wall in Tyler Zigman's "Over the Wall." Darren Hardy puts the zombies to work in a dark future British Empire still ruled by Queen Victoria the Everlasting in his "Frankenstein 1935." W. David Pattison's "Our Zombies at War" gives an alternate World War II fought by both sides using zombie troops and dark magic, the Axis using Thule zombies, the USSR Psychotropic zombies, and the USA zombie super soldiers developed by Project West! "The Dread Menace" by Daniel R. Robichaud II twists McCarthyism to a deadlier threat.

These are all decent entities, but the longer the Dead World the better, and several of those are also historical. Matthew McFarland's "The Blighted Isle" takes the tragedy of Ireland's Potato Famine of 1846 and makes it nastier. As more die, more rise again, and they are very, very hungry. The British Government is forced to quarantine the whole of Ireland, but what happens if an outbreak happens on British soil? Or escapes by ship to the USA?

"The 47 Gaki" by Michael McConnell is also inspired by a historical incident in which 47 Ronin took revenge upon the lord who had driven their master to attack him. Although technically murderers, the Ronin are regarded as heroes for their loyalty and obedience and it is these themes that this Dead World explores. Admittedly from beyond the grave with the player cast of samurai facing the 47 returned Ronin who enact their revenge in creating and leading an army of zombies, making use of ***[Enter the Zombie.](#)*** This Dead World takes the story right from the outbreak through to dealing with the threat or even living under it.

Of the rest, Nik Havert's "The Not So Perfect Storm" is a one-shot affair that shipwrecks the cast members on an island, only to be besieged by zombies, and Jason Mical's "Tales of the Walking Dead: Arabian Nights" does The Thousand and one Nights with zombies. "The Crusade of the Damned" by Thomas D Coster Jr. feels similar to "The 47 Gaki" in that it brings back warriors as zombies, but this time it is templar warriors and the era is that of ***[Pulp Zombies.](#)***

Monica Valentinelli's "Sweet Zombie Treat" just confirms that dessert is not good for you, whilst "Welcome to Whimseyville" by Erin Mills turns a Florida theme park into a zombie hell. Finally "Necropolis Ascendant" by Andrew Peregrine presents a future of city states ruled by necromancers capable of holding off the zombie hordes, whilst the rest of humanity lives in state of nihilism. The only way to rise above humanity's malaise is to work for the city's necromancer.

The last few Dead Worlds look to the future and specifically towards the forthcoming *All Tomorrow's Zombies.* Mike Wallace's "Immortality" is set in a town of survivors just off the interstate, with political tensions, secrets, and the undead outside. "Panacea" by John Karakash is less interesting, offering a future in which technology has found a cure for most ills and injuries, giving perfect health until old age. Unfortunately, unexpected deaths turn corpses into mindless zombies although implants can control such urges and put them to work.

Daniel Proctor's "Legacy" is heavily inspired by *Do Androids Dream Of Electric Sheep?* with an Earth ravaged by zombies and humanity at war with its short lived creations, the Simulacra. This can be run as a pre-apocalypse dystopia, or as the Dead World given. The last Dead World is "The Dead of Space" by Rob Boyle, set aboard a giant colonization ship. This can be run with the cast members awakening suffering from amnesia -- it eases the shock of colonization -- and at the mercy of the zombies. Alternatively the cast could be tribe members living centuries aboard this very small world. The truth be told, these are the two entries of the collection given here, that grabbed my attention.

Not every Dead World quite works. These include Michael Kvorjak's "Dial Z for Hero," a Dead World in which its superheroes and villains are zombies! It suggests that you make use of the combat rules from ***[Zombie Smackdown!](#)*** and although it tries to adapt the rules to the superhero genre, it definitely needs further development. Gordon Dritschilo's "Peace, Love, and Zombies," which mixes hippies and the undead, suffers similarly. So does "Parallelium" by Kelly Stack, which feels more suited to the ***[Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game](#)*** in casting ordinary folk into an alternate fantasy-fuelled Dead World with an evil Wizard, trolls, wyrms, and zombies.

Worlds of the Dead, or George Vasilakos' "Big Book of Zombie Scenarios," does exactly what it says on the tin. With 21 Dead Worlds to choose from there has to be something here to whet the appetite of any Zombie Master. None of them are awful, though a few could have been dropped in favor of giving room for others to receive further development. Of those 21, "Immortality," "The Blighted Isle," "The 47 Gaki," "Legacy," and "The Dead of Space" all stand out as being the most playable or at best the most interesting. The Zombie Master is of course going to get the most out of this supplement, but *Worlds of the Dead* is not just a useful source of ideas for *All Flesh Must Be Eaten,* but the universal nature of the Dead Worlds it presents means that they can be run using any game system.

--Matthew Pook

Journals Redux

Over on the *Pyramid* message boards -- where everybody knows your name -- there was a lot of discussion over last week's installment. (Just to ground everyone who doesn't want to click on the hypertexted link, that was the one where I talk about retracing the steps of a previous expedition.) Never one to leave a possible column idea hanging in the ether, I thought I'd revisit the issue and offer more random thoughts; this installment's mixture is two parts hodge to one part podge.

First, Peter Dell'Orto (Metropolis, New York) expresses some surprise at my dislike of the dotted-line-style treasure map compared to my enjoyment of journals or more abstract representations. I explained that, in my experience, one of the problems with direct piratey-treasure-type maps is that they can provide enough information for the PCs to travel as they will, bypassing the bulk of the map and even jumping directly to the end. If the pirate map shows the path going past the Caverns of Despair, over the Treacherous Bogs, and continuing to the southern-most part of the Lake of Ennui, then the heroes might wonder, "Hey... can't we just go northwest around the caverns, bypass them entirely, scoot on by the Village of Frou-Frou Drinks, and make our way leisurely to the Lake?" (No doubt bypassing several planned encounters in the process . . .)

A journal, however, sidesteps these issues, without doing so in a way that feels cheap or forced. After all, if the journal says, "We walked east for two days, stopping outside a cavern with a bird-shaped opening before continuing northeast from there..." then they probably won't have much ability to jump over or around anything. Knowledge of maps isn't going to be very useful in these cases, since most of the info in a journal is subjective. ("What the heck does a 'bird-shaped opening' mean, anyway? Well, hopefully we'll know it when we see it...")

That's not to say that a map can't be made so obscure that the only way to reach the destination is to follow the map exactly, but the players I have are usually craftier than that, and given a chamber with "only one way out" they'll eventually decide on one of four possibilities they concocted.

Peter responded (not incorrectly) that this may be true of your typical back-of-the-cereal-box black-dotted-line treasure maps (a great turn of phrase), but not so "real" treasure maps. Now, I still contend that, unless done carefully or creatively, such maps require landmarks which the players might use to try to jump the turnstile. I've encountered both published adventures and computer RPGs that feature such maps, and there almost always exists a chance for the players to utilize the map to skip ahead, yet these adventures seldom take this possibility into account.

My favorite examples of this phenomenon are in computer RPGs, where the player has resolved a situation, and afterwords you're presented with detailed instructions about how to deal with that problem . . . usually via means of an interminable unskippable dialog tree:

Old Man: Young heroes, you are the only ones who can thwart the Sea Hag.

Party: What, you mean the one at the bottom of that pit? 'Cause we already whacked her a . . .

Old Man: First, you must find the secret passage near the ever-burning torches.

Party: Right. It's about 20 yards from here; if you look around the corner, you can se . . .

Old Man: Then, you must press the sigil on the wall that is a butterfly that is not a butterfly.

Party: Yeah; the caterpillar. Actually, we just pushed all of them and, after a few random stabbings and poisonings, we found the righ . . .

Old Man: After that, you must traverse the Spiral of Pain.

Party: Did that. Look, Gramps, we're just going to keep a dictionary on the space bar and play our Gameboy 'til you

finish talking, okay?

The following point could probably fill up its own column, but I'll at least get the ball rolling here: I have a hard time saying "No" to players. (In fact, I've written a column or two about learning how to say "Yes" as a GM.) So if they point to a promising-looking landmark on a map that's further along the predefined location and say, "I want to roll to find that spot; I've got a pretty good Tracking skill and I'm spending a Luck Point" . . . well, it feels lame and railroading to say, "Sorry; you don't find anything. You really need to follow the red dotted line." I could just be personal experience, but I've generally gotten the vibe that my players are more understanding if they know that the pieces won't make sense unless they're following them in the predefined order, and I usually have an easier time when that means a journal, verbal description, or other subject-to-interpretation information.

Having said that, there's one dotted-line map that I enjoy, and that's the "Map torn into X pieces" shtick. A well-designed jigsaw-puzzle map should be nearly impossible to follow without all the pieces in hand, and the players can't act on information they don't have yet, regardless of whether it's objective or subjective. The trick here is to make sure that the final goal is worth the effort; if a 16-part map ultimately leads to a small sack of copper coins, no jury in the world would convict the players for what they do to you. For example, the computer game *Ultima VI* forces the players to search for nine pieces of a treasure map, which leads to a dungeon (complete locked door), which leads to a tablet that you need to drag to someone else to translate for the adventure to continue. The first time I played it, I worked less to get my college degree.

Okay; moving on to our next random thought, Edward Elder (Savage Lands, Antarctica) asked, "How do out hypothetical journals get to the heroes in the first place, if journal writer dies or fails to complete the mission in the last 10 minutes he's writing it?" An excellent question, and one I would feel guiltier about overlooking if my installment last week wasn't already pretty long.

Anyway, there are a few classic means of getting the journal/map/instructions back to the heroes. Here are some ideas:

It was the journal writer himself, who recognized the danger that his ultimate encounter posed to him. This was the tack taken by the journal-writer in the graphic novel *Watchmen,* who mailed his compilation to a location he trusted. (Of course, the journal writer in question doesn't need to have the post office box number of the heroes; any third-party location or liaison who could theoretically know the writer and know how to contact the adventurers could serve.) Magic or supernatural means are also possible to get that McGuffin to the players at the last minute, or hide it from the victim's final fate.

The heroes can encounter the journal from the minions of the writer's target. Let's say the journalier got to the last encounter with Hawaiian horror C.T. Hulu, before being squicked like a bug. Hulu's unnatural minions run roughshod over the corpse, snatching interesting-looking bits before spiraling out into the night to spread more mayhem. Sneaking aboard a cruise ship, one creature (complete with the journal) causes mayhem, arriving in port six months later in a far-off land, where the heroes are sent to investigate the corridors of the ship . . .

Alternatively, the party might acquire the mapguffin from the enemies of their enemies. For example, if the dark elves hate the fish people (and both species are enemies of mankind), then the fish people might acquire Dr. McGuffin's journal in a raid on the dark elves, escaping with it as treasure. This situation might be especially intriguing if the heroes end up thinking the journal is about the wrong group. ("Waitaminute . . . I thought this was supposed to help us deal with the fish people; what are all these dark elves doing here?!")

And, finally, there's also always the possibility that the bad guy seeded it to the heroes himself. This is especially true if the journal-writer hid various objects or supplemental clues along the way (which the adversary can't access directly but hopes the heroes might).

If players hate railroading, they usually love giving chase, of feeling like they're peeling the onion themselves; many players also appreciate the challenge that *they* won't succumb to the problems that the journal-writer did. And so they go, following the path to the inevitable end . . .

--*Steven Marsh*

Appendix Z

Self-Control Mitigators for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Kelly Pedersen

The Mitigator limitation in *GURPS Fourth Edition* is a very useful one; it allows characters with "controllable" disadvantages to be built more easily. The nearsighted professor with his spectacles, the terminally ill hero holding off death with an experimental drug regimen, the mad scientist compensating for his blindness with a camera implanted in his brain -- Mitigator covers it all. However, one area Mitigator does not represent well is the disadvantage that is reduced, but not eliminated. This is particularly relevant to disadvantages with self-control rolls. In fiction and reality, drugs, esoteric treatments, or technological devices can often help a character cope with their personality problems, but total removal of those problems is rather less common. This rules variant aims to compensate for this hole in the *GURPS* rules, providing guidelines for Mitigators that help you deal with your problem, rather than simply eliminating it.

A Self-Control Mitigator acts much like a normal Mitigator -- as long as the character continues to use the drug, device, etc., the disadvantage that the Mitigator applies to is reduced in effect. However, instead of simply removing the effects of the disadvantage, the Self-Control Mitigator provides a bonus to all self-control rolls the character makes.

There are three levels of Self-Control Mitigator, providing +3, +6, and +9 to self-control rolls respectively. The value of the limitation, like a regular Mitigator, depends on how easy the mitigating condition is to use. The limitation values for the various levels of Self-Control Mitigators are as follows:

+3 to self-control rolls

Daily drug/breakable device: -40%
Weekly drug: -45%
Monthly drug: -50%

+6 to self-control rolls

Daily drug/breakable device: -50%
Weekly drug: -55%
Monthly drug: -60%

+9 to self-control rolls

Daily drug/breakable device: -60%
Weekly drug: -65%
Monthly drug: -70%

These values are further modified by the other conditions from the standard Mitigator limitation: +5% if the Mitigator requires a special prescription, or +10% if the Mitigator is only available from one specific source.

Example: "Knuckles" Johnson suffers from serious anger management issues; he has Bad Temper with a self-control number of 6, worth -20 points. After one too many brawls end up with someone seriously hurt, a judge orders Knuckles to undergo therapy. In the course of his counseling, the psychiatrist suggests that Knuckles try a new anti-aggression drug. Desperate to stay out of prison, Knuckles agrees. The drug grants +6 to self-control rolls; it must be

taken daily and requires a prescription, for a total limitation value of -45%. Knuckles' self-control number on Bad Temper is now effectively 12, and the disadvantage is now worth -11 points.

Of course, a character can still spend points in order to improve his self-control number independently of the Mitigator. In this case, the Self-Control Mitigator's bonus will simply apply to the new self-control number, making it all the more likely that he will resist his disadvantage.

Example: After a couple years of counseling, Knuckles has successfully reduced his aggressive impulses; his self-control number is now 9. He still takes the drug, however, since his psychiatrist is not yet convinced that Knuckles will never throw another punch in anger. His self-control number with the drug is effectively 15, and the Mitigated disadvantage is worth -8 points.

Using Self-Control Mitigators, it is quite possible to have a self-control number of 18 or higher. In this case, the character still fails self-control rolls on an 18. In addition, circumstances can impose penalties that bring a character's self-control roll down to more easily-failed levels. This distinguishes disadvantages that have been brought to only -1 point by Self-Control Mitigators from quirks; these should not be counted against the campaign quirk limit, if one is imposed.

Example: A decade after his original brush with the legal system, Knuckles has almost totally overcome his anger-management problems. His player has paid points to raise his self-control modifier to 15, and a new drug has come on the market that is even more effective than Knuckles' original prescription: it adds +9 to the self-control roll, and only needs to be taken monthly, for a limitation value of -65% (it still needs a prescription). Knuckles effectively resists his Bad Temper on a 24 or less, for a point value of -1.

However, it has been a very bad day for Knuckles; when he got to work, he was informed that he was being fired as part of a downsizing, his girlfriend left him a break-up message on his answering machine, and he got a letter from the IRS, informing him that he owes $500 in back taxes. For the past two hours, Knuckles has been drinking in his favorite bar, and he is now tipsy (-2 to self-control rolls). And someone has just knocked over his drink into his lap, and then insulted his hat. The GM rules that the general circumstances of the day, combined with Knuckles' tipsy condition, result in a -10 penalty to his self-control roll, for an effective target of 14. Knuckles' player rolls - and gets a 15. Oops. Looks like it's a trip to the emergency room for the idiot who bothered our hero, and back to therapy for Knuckles.

Terrible Beauties

for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Stephen Dedman

"'Twas beauty killed the beast."
--Carl Denham, *King Kong*

"I wish you would stop looking for beauty in things that want to kill us."
Tyr Anasazi, *Andromeda*

Beauty has been described as a fatal gift, but sometimes it can prove fatal to bystanders rather than the recipient.

With this in mind, here is a collection of beautiful people intended to make life more interesting -- and possibly much shorter, particularly for player characters with the Lecherousness disadvantage. Each one is designed with a particular cultural background in mind, but requires only minor changes to adapt for almost any setting.

Achilla

Achillia is a female gladiator from Gaul, famed for her skill as a dimachaeurus (two knife fighter). She has won enough matches to earn her freedom, but keeps returning to the arena because she enjoys the adulation and the adrenalin rush. When not fighting, watching fights or training fighters, Achillia can usually be found in wineshop below her small apartment, enjoying gossip and the company of her admirers.

Achillia plans to marry if she lives into her thirties and has to think about retirement, and is always on the look-out for husband material -- but in the interim, she's a serial monogamist, who's slept with even more men than she's killed. Getting her into bed is rarely difficult: even a critical failure on Sex-Appeal skill isn't likely to earn the suitor anything more deadly than a knee strike to the groin. The main problem with being her lover is that Achillia expects all of her men to remain faithful to her until she discards them, and may attack those she catches with other women. She also enjoys watching men fight over her.

Trying to end a relationship with Achillia is much more dangerous than starting one; the best thing to do is to either come up with a pretext for leaving Rome, or to wait until she finds someone else more appealing (which usually takes one to six months -- 1d, or one month for each point of the love object's positive reaction roll modifiers).

If provoked into a lethal attack, either in the arena or outside it, Achillia's usual response is to draw her knives and slash at a man's groin, giving him the choice of surviving as a eunuch or bleeding to death. She rarely uses her knife on women, preferring to punch them in the face repeatedly.

Campaign Uses: Achillia is intended as bait for characters with the Lecherousness disadvantage: a way of luring them into danger. She's not a particularly expensive mistress, though she does expect occasional gifts from lovers who can afford them (add 15-20% to cost of living for status of 1 or higher); less wealthy suitors may be asked for Favors (treat as a -2 point Duty disadvantage).

Other Settings: Achillia is designed for an *Imperial Rome* campaign, but she can easily be adapted to any setting with gladiatorial contests (legal or otherwise).

Achillia   *170 points*

Ht 5'7", Wt 145 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 26.

Appearance: Fair complexion, black hair cut short, blue eyes; a healthy-looking woman with a beautiful face and body, and heavily-scarred muscular arms.

Languages: Gaulish (Native) [0], Latin (Accented) [4]. TL: 2. Cultural Familiarity: Imperial Rome.

Attributes: ST 13 [30]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 13 [30]. [100 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d/2d-1; BL 34; HP 13 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 11 [5]; FP 16 [9]; Basic Speed 7 [15]; Basic Move 7 [0]. [29 points]

Advantages and Perks: Ambidexterity [5]; Appearance (Beautiful) [12]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Fearlessness/2 [4]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Honest Face [1]; Less Sleep/2 [4]; Reputation: accomplished gladiator, +2 to gladiator fans (large group), always recognized [5]. [56 points].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Bad Temper (6)[-20]; Bloodlust (12)[-10]; Congenial [-1]; Impulsiveness (15)[-6]; Jealousy (9)[-15]; Lecherousness (15)[-7]; Social Stigma (Minority Group, -2) [-10]; Staid [-1]. [-70 points].

Skills and Techniques: Acrobatics (H) DX [4]-12; Area Knowledge (Rome) (E) IQ [1]-10; Body Language (A) Per [2]-11; Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-13; Carousing (A) HT [2]-13; Current Affairs/TL2 (Sport) (E) IQ [1]-10; Elbow Strike (A) Brawling-1 [1]-12; Dual-Weapon Attack (Knife) (H) Knife [5]; Erotic Art (A) DX+1 [4]-14; Fast-Draw (Knife) (E) DX [2]-14 *; Holdout (A) IQ [2]-10; Knee Strike (A) Brawling [2]-13; Melee Weapon (Knife) (E) DX+3 [8]-15; Sex Appeal (A) HT+1 [4]-14; Streetwise (A) IQ-1 [1]-9; Survival (Woodlands) (A) Per-1 [1]-10; Swimming (E) HT [1]-13; Thrown Weapon (Knife) (E) DX+2 [4]-14; Wrestling (A) DX+1 [4]-13. [51 points]

* +1 for Combat Reflexes

Gear: Two large knives (fine quality).

Carrie Norris

Isaac Asimov once said that one saving grace of mad scientists is that they traditionally have a beautiful daughter, and Julian Norris is no exception.

Professor Norris is famed as an astronomer, but he is also known for being interested in the stranger fringes of science to the point of regarding the Theoretical Science Foundation as being conservative. Despite occasionally unethical behavior, he is tolerated by the orthodox scientific community because he keeps making remarkable discoveries in a variety of fields while looking for something else (usually signs of extra-terrestrial intelligence).

Norris's wife died when Carrie, their only child, was 14. Carrie soon took over the job of acting as her father's assistant and caregiver. As well as studying the stars, she was fascinated by nocturnal animals, particularly bats.

Carrie doesn't remember being bitten by a vampire, but once she'd risen from her grave near the observatory, she and her father adjusted very quickly: the only problem was obtaining enough human blood to keep her active. The Professor usually get supplies from unethical medical researchers, but sometimes these sources dry up and Carrie has to leave the observatory to hunt for drifters or campers -- or snack on visiting scientists and students. She prefers unconscious victims who she can leave alive, but either she or her father will kill to keep her safe.

Professor Norris tries to keep Carrie out of sight as much as possible (after all, she's legally dead), but PCs who visit his observatory would be well advised not to investigate any locked rooms.

Carrie dreams of finding a husband, but will react very badly to indecent propositions.

Campaign Uses: If Carrie Norris takes a liking to a PC, she may become a useful Ally. She could also be a dangerous

Enemy . . . and her father's friends include some of the Cabal's most ingenious mad scientists and gadgeteers.

Norris is also hoping to find a way to bring Carrie fully back to life -- even if it means transplanting her brain into another body (female, of course).

Other Settings: Carrie Norris is designed for an *Atomic Horror* campaign, but with minor tweaking she would fit into any setting from *Steampunk* to *Cyberpunk.*

Carrie Norris   *275 points*

Ht 5'5", Wt 120 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 24.

Appearance: A beautiful young woman, with a pale complexion, platinum blonde hair, and pale blue eyes.

Languages: English (Native). TL: 7. Cultural Familiarity: Western.

Attributes: ST 14 [40]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 13 [30]. [130 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d/2d; BL 39; HP 14 [0]; Will 13 [5]; Per 15 [15]; FP 13 [0]; Basic Speed 6 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]. [20 points]

Advantages and Perks: Absolute Timing [2]; Ally (Father, appears on 6 or less) [6]; Alternate Forms (Bat, Wolf) [30]; Appearance (Beautiful) [12]; Charisma 2 [10]; Doesn't Breathe [20]; Dominance [20]; Eidetic Memory [5]; Honest Face [1]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (Unliving) [20]; Insubstantiality (Costs Fatigue; 2 FP, -10%) [72]; Night Vision 8 [8]; Speak With Animals (Wolves and bats, -60%) [10]; Unaging [15]; Unkillable 2 (Achilles' Heel: Wood, -50%) [50]; Vampiric Bite [30]. [341 points].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Attentive [-1]; Bad Sight (Nearsighted; Mitigator, glasses, -60%) [10]; Broad-Minded [-1]; Collects romance novels and horror comics [-1]; Curious (6) [-10]; Dependency (Coffin with soil of homeland; Daily)[-60]; Dependent (Father, Loved One) [-30]; 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]; Mild phobia of sex [-1]; Pacifism (Reluctant Killer) [-5]; Shyness, Mild [-5]; Supernatural Features (No Body Heat*, No Reflection, Pallor *)[-16]; Unhealing (Partial) [-20]; Weakness (Sunlight; 1d/minute)[-60]; Workaholic [-5]. [-266 points].

Skills: Acting (A) IQ-2 [1]-10 *; Administration (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Artist (Drawing) (H) IQ [4]-12; Astronomy/TL7 (H) IQ+1 [8]-13; Cooking (E) IQ [1]-12; Current Affairs/TL7 (Science & Technology) (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Driving/TL7 (Car) (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Electronics Operation/TL (Scientific) (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Expert Skill (Thanatology) (H) IQ-1 [2]-11; First Aid/TL (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Housekeeping (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Judo (H) DX-1 [2]-10; Naturalist (H) IQ [4]-12; Photography/TL7 (A) IQ [2]-12; Research/TL7 (A) IQ+2 [8]-14; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ-1 [1]-11 *; Scrounging (E) Per [2]-16; Typing (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Weird Science (VH) IQ-1 [2]-10; Writing (A) IQ+1 [4]-12. [50 points]

* -1 for Shyness

Paula Chiang

Paula Chiang had grown up on Alardin, but was working as a security guard on Ironsides when a fuel tank exploded nearby. By the time she was rescued, her body was burned beyond recognition and fragments of the tank had destroyed her eyes and parts of her brain -- but she was still undeniably alive.

Because her medical insurance didn't cover such extensive injuries, her employer was about to opt for euthanasia, but one of their medical scientists convinced the accountants that Paula would be more valuable as an experimental subject. Over the next few years, they replaced her skin, eyes, and other damaged body parts with vat-grown

synthetics, and discovered that some of these had remarkable properties. Eventually, they had a cyborg able to impersonate any person of similar size.

Paula spent the next few years training to act as a spy for the corporate state. She didn't remember much about her past, so she was prepared to accept her employer's assurances that she was injured in an eco-terrorist attack and that the company had healed her at their own expense -- which she would now have to pay back. Once she'd gotten used to her new body, she came to enjoy what it could do. On and off-duty, she frequently shapes herself into a Very Handsome man or Very Beautiful woman... though when she needs to travel without being noticed, she does so as a very average-looking individual.

Paula now acts as much out of loyalty to the corporation as anything else; her debt rarely decreases, as she regularly agrees to more implants and modifications. She's mostly employed as an industrial spy and saboteur, but when she's asked to kill, she does so without compunction.

Campaign Uses: Paula will usually be encountered acting as an agent for the corporation (or whatever medium-sized group the GM chooses). She may be assigned to spy on the PCs, or to guard them, or to kill them. She likes using Sex Appeal to get close to her victims, preferring to rob them while they're asleep or naked, or to murder them in bed with no witnesses present.

Because Paula often mimics innocent bystanders when she wants to blend in, there's also a danger that she will take on the form of one or more of the PCs -- temporarily giving them a Mistaken Identity disadvantage that can prove very dangerous, especially if the same form is seen committing a murder and making a quick getaway . . .

Other Settings: Paula is designed for use in a *Space* or *Cyberpunk* setting, though with a slightly different origin story, she'd make a fine metavillain for a Supers campaign.

Paula Chiang   *475 points*

Ht 5'10", Wt 150 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 39.

Appearance: Variable (see below).

Languages: Universal (Native). TL: 11. Cultural Familiarity: Edda Sector.

Attributes: ST 13 [30]; DX 13 [60]; IQ 13 [60]; HT 13 [30]. [180 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d/2d-1; BL 34; HP 15 [10]; Will 13 [0]; Per 16 [15]; FP 13 [0]; Basic Speed 7 [5]; Basic Move 7 [0]. [30 points]

Advantages and Perks: Ambidexterity [5]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Double-Jointed [-15]; Fearlessness/3 [6]; Fit [5]; Gizmos [5]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Less Sleep/3 [6]; Security Clearance [10]; Temperature Tolerance 1 [1]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10]. [94 points].

Cybernetics: Accessory [1]; Breath-Holding 3 [6]; Chameleon 3 [15]; Discriminatory Hearing [15]; Elastic Skin [20]; Extra Arms (Bioplastic hair: Extra-flexible Enhancement +50%; Weak limitation, -50%)[10]; Hermaphromorph (Takes Extra Time limitation x2, -20%)[4]; Infravision [10]; Mimicry [10]; Modular Abilities (Chip Slots 2 (4, 4)[34]; Payload (Cargo, 4 lbs)[2]; Sanitized Metabolism [1]; Voice [10]. [168 points].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Amnesia [-10]; Callous [-5]; Careful [-1]; Curious (12)[-5]; Debt [5]; Duty (12 or less)[-10]; Flashbacks (Mild)[-5]; Greed (15)[-7]; Imaginative [-1]; Intolerance [-10]; Likes sadomasochistic porn [-1]; Sense of Duty (Company)[Large Group)[-15]; Unusual Biochemistry [-5]. [-79 points]

Skills and Techniques: Acrobatics (H) DX [4]-13; Acting (A) IQ [2]-13; Area Knowledge (Edda Sector) (E) IQ [1]-13; Beam Weapons/TL11 (Pistol) (E) DX+1 [2]-15; Climbing (A) DX+3 [2]-18*; Detect Lies (H) Per [4]-15;

Disguise (A) IQ+2 [4]-18§; Electronic Operations/TL11 (Security Systems)(A) IQ [2]-13; Erotic Art (A) DX+4 [1]-16*; Escape (H) DX+1 [1]-17*; Fast-Draw (Knife)(E) DX+1 [1]-14‡; Fast-Draw (Pistol)(E) DX+1 [1]-14‡; Fast-Talk (A) IQ+2 [2]-15†; Interrogation (A) IQ [2]-13; Intimidation (A) Will [1]-13; Judo (H) DX [2]-12; Karate (H) DX+1 [8]-14; Kicking (H) Karate [3]-14; Knee Strike (A) Karate [2]-14; Mimicry (Speech) (H) IQ+2 [4]-15†; Observation (A) Per [2]-15; Photography/TL11 (A) IQ [2]-13; Research/TL11 (A) IQ+1 [4]-14; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-13; Scaling (H) Climbing -1 [2]-17; Search (A) Per [2]-15; Sex Appeal (A) HT+2 [2]-15†; Shadowing (A) IQ+1 [4]-14; Stealth (A) DX+1 [4]-14; Streetwise (A) IQ+1 [2]-13; Swimming (E) DX [1]-13; Throwing (A) DX [2]-13; Tracking (A) Per [1]-14. [79 points]

* +5 for Double-Jointed
† +2 for Voice
‡ +1 for Combat Reflexes
§ +4 for Elastic Skin

Sir Vyvyan Dumont

Gear: Fine Thrusting Bastard Sword; Lance; Large Knife; Dagger; Medium Shield; Steel Corselet, Plate Arms and Legs, Greathelm, Gauntlets, Sollerets; Heavy Cloak; Heavy Warhorse in Full Plate Barding and Head/Neck Armor, with War Saddle; Personal Basics; First Aid Kit.

Sir Vyvyan is widely esteemed as an example of the perfect gentil knight: handsome, brave, chivalrous, and skilled with weaponry. Much of his reputation comes from his performance in tournaments, where he always draws a crowd; he is also famed as a slayer of monsters, having brought back a good collection of severed heads, skins, and dragon hoards as trophies of his exploits. Bards and jesters have dubbed him Sir Vivor, because of his ability to return from the hunt without so much as a bruise on his handsome face. It's less often remarked -- at least, not at court -- that many of Sir Vyvyan's squires and other companions don't return at all, or that he spends more on new armor, weapons and warhorses than any other knight in the king's service.

Much of Sir Vyvyan's success comes from a powerful charm placed upon him at birth -- a spell that automatically teleports him to safety if he's in serious peril. Sometimes this is against his will; more often, he's unconscious when it happens, and wakes up naked miles from the battle or the monster's lair. Unfortunately, he can not take his companions with him. None have survived to tell of his miraculous escapes, and as Vyvyan is ashamed of his gift, he doesn't speak of it either: at most, he may try to discourage those who would follow him, but he will never ignore a call to arms or a perilous quest.

Sir Vyvyan believes in Courtly Love, but his vow of chastity gives him +4 to resist Sex-Appeal attempts.

Campaign Uses: If the PCs attach themselves to Sir Vyvyan in the hope of gaining glory and/or treasure, they are likely to find both -- but there may also come a time when they find that the strongest fighter of their team has disappeared, leaving the dragon chewing on an empty suit of armor. As a small consolation, when Sir Vyvyan disappears, he also leaves some very good weapons and other items behind.

While has obvious drawbacks as an Ally, Sir Vyvyan would make a very dangerous Enemy.

Other Settings: Sir Vyvyan is intended for use in a fantasy campaign, but could be encountered in any settings where magic works. In a no-mana zone, his protective charm won't work, and he'll have to fight alongside the player characters!

Sir Vyvyan Dumont   *200 points*

6'4", 220 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 36.

Appearance: tanned complexion, gray eyes, short wavy black hair.

Languages: Anglish (Native). [0 points] TL: 3. Cultural Familiarity: Yrth.

Attributes: ST 14 [40]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 13 [30]. [90 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d/2d; BL 39; HP 14 [0]; Will 11 [5]; Per 11 [5]; FP 13 [0]; Basic Speed 6 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]. [10 points]

Advantages and Perks: Appearance (Very Handsome, Impressive)[16]; Charisma 5 [25]; Daredevil [15]; Fearlessness 5 [10]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Rapid Healing [5]; Reputation (hero, +3, recognized by everyone all the time)[15]; Status 2 [10]; Warp (10 mile range, -20%; Uncontrollable, -10%, Unconscious Only, -20%, Arrives Naked, -30%)[20]; Very Fit [15]; Wealth (Comfortable)[10]. [141 points].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Alcohol Intolerance [-1]; Chummy [-5]; Code of Honor (Chivalry)[-15]; Duty (Liege Lord; 9 or less)[-5]; Honesty (6)[-20]; Impulsiveness (12)[-10]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; Overconfidence (6)[-10]; Vow (Chastity)[-5]; Vow (Never refuse a quest for aid) [-15]; Weirdness Magnet [-15]. [-111 points].

Skills and Techniques: Animal Handling (Equine) (A) IQ [4]-11; Armoury/TL3 (Melee Weapons)(A) IQ [2]-10; Falconry (A) IQ [2]-10; First Aid/TL3 (E) IQ [1]-10; Heraldry (A) IQ [2]-10; Lance (A) DX+2 [16]-15; Leadership (A) IQ+6 [4]-16*; Melee Weapon (Broadsword) (A) DX+2 [12]-14; Public Speaking (A) IQ+4 [1]-14*; Riding (Horse) (A) DX [8]-13; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ+2 [4]-12; Shield (E) DX+3 [8]-14; Tactics (H) IQ-2 [1]-8. [60 points]

* +5 for Charisma

Wakana the Songbird

Wakana the Songbird is a Kyoto geisha famed for her musical performances as much as her beauty. Her concerts are always well-attended by Kyoto's wealthiest and most influential, and serve as advertisements for her private parties. Only the very fortunate get to sleep with her.

Wakana likes money, and what it can buy: unfortunately, more than 90% of her earnings go to her mama-san, and much of the rest goes on clothes, jewelry and cosmetics. She lives in hope of persuading someone to buy her contract (worth 4,000 silver), and uses all of her abilities to that end.

Campaign Uses: PCs with the Lecherousness disadvantage who meet Wakana and fail their self-control rolls will be offered a chance to attend one of her parties, at a cost of 200 silver pieces (no guarantee of sex, unless Wakana has an Excellent reaction to the character). PCs who lack the funds will have to make a Will roll to avoid being tempted into selling their belongings or joining risky money-making schemes (treasure hunts, robberies, etc.). Desire for Wakana can easily turn into an Obsession disadvantage (-5 points for wanting to sleep with her, -10 points for wanting to buy her contract).

Wakana also makes a dangerous Enemy: her devotees always include at least one daimyo with a retinue of samurai, and at least one wealthy merchant who hires sumo wrestlers as bodyguards. The easiest way to make her a PC's enemy is for her to think he's stolen from her, or broken a promise (particularly a promise of money).

Other Settings: With a little tweaking, Wakana can fit into any world that combines a sex industry with other forms of entertainment. In other times and worlds, she may have extra disadvantages such as Addiction or Social Disease, and be in debt to her drug dealer or other criminal figures, rather than being indentured to a mama-san.

Wakana the Songbird   *225 points*

Ht 4'11", Wt 95 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 26 (usually looks younger).

Appearance: Ivory complexion, immaculately groomed black hair, brown eyes; a beautiful Japanese woman in brightly colored silk kimono.

Languages: Japanese (Native) [0]. TL: 4. Cultural Familiarity: Japan.

Attributes: ST 8 [-20]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 12 [20]. [90 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16; HP 9 [0]; Will 13 [5]; Per 13 [5]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]. [10 points]

Advantages and Perks: Acute Hearing 2 [4]; Appearance (Very Beautiful) [16]; Charisma 1 [5]; Fashion Sense [5]; Fit [5]; Musical Ability 2 [10]; No Hangover [1]; Reputation (+2 to wealthy, large group, always recognized) [5]; Versatile [5]; Voice [10]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10]. [81 points].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Callous [-5]; Debt [-2]; Dislikes cats [-1]; Duty (on 15 or less, Nonhazardous)[-10]; Greed (12)[-15]; Imaginative [-1]; Incompetence (Navigation)[-1]; Likes fellow artists (+1 or more to reaction rolls); Proud [-1]; Social Stigma (Valuable Property) [-10]. [-57 points]

Skills and Techniques: Acting (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Area Knowledge (Kyoto) (E) IQ [2]-13; Artist (Flower Arranging) (H) IQ [4]-12; Carousing (E) HT+2 [4]-14; Connoisseur (Music) (A) IQ [2]-12; Current Affairs/TL6 (High Culture)(E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Dancing (A) DX [4]-13; Detect Lies (H) Per [4]-13; Diplomacy (H) IQ+3 [8]-15†; Erotic Art (A) DX [4]-13; Fast-Talk (A) IQ+2 [2]-14†; First Aid/TL4 (E) IQ [1]-12; Holdout (A) IQ [1]-11; Judo (H) DX [2]-11; Knot-Tying (E) DX [1]-12; Literature (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Makeup/TL4 (E) IQ+2 [2]-13; Meditation (Tea Ceremony)(H) Wil [2]-12; Melee Weapon (Knife) (E) DX [2]-13; Merchant (A) IQ [2]-12; Mimicry (Speech) (H) IQ+ [2]-13†; Musical Composition (H) IQ+2 [2]-15*; Musical Influence (VH) IQ+3 [4]-15*†; Musical Instrument (Samisen)(H) IQ [2]-15*; Observation (A) Per-1 [1]-12; Performance (A) IQ+3 [8]-15†; Professional Skill (Geisha) (A) IQ+2 [8]-14; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Sex Appeal (A) HT+1 [8]-16†; Singing (E) HT+5 [2]-18*†; Writing (A) IQ [2]-12. [96 points]

* +2 for Musical Ability
† +2 for Voice

Gear: Dagger disguised as hair ornament; silk kimono; samisen; fan; personal basics.

Adventure Seeds

Now You See Him . . . *(Fantasy)* Prince Amar rightly suspects that his wife Talia is in love with Sir Vyvyan. He has no proof of infidelity, but he asks the PCs to watch the knight, to make sure that he's never alone with the princess. This means following him on his quests until the Prince feels sure that nothing untoward is going on. If his paranoia worsens, he might even arrange for Sir Vyvyan to be killed -- which will prove much more difficult than he thinks.

Farce Majeure *(Japan):* Wakana comes to believe that one of her clients has enough money to buy her contract, and that the only reason he doesn't do so is that he's already married. She persuades another of her lovers to send someone to kill the man's wife, Ryoko.

The PCs are recruited to guard Ryoko -- who is also Beautiful, has the Lecherousness disadvantage, and is quietly angry that her husband is spending so much on a geisha. She can't stop him, but she might take revenge by trying to seduce an appealing PC who's acting as her bodyguard. If she succeeds, the PCs will have to hide the affair from their employer, or be in more danger from his hirelings than they are from Wakana's.

Business and Desire *(Horror):* When aging millionaire Hugh Howe hears that Carrie Norris is a vampire, he offers Norris a small fortune if she will bite a few experimental subjects, to see whether they turn into vampires. If they do, and don't age, then Howe himself wants to be bitten. When the Norrises refuse, Howe arranges for Carrie to be abducted.

Norris escapes, and asks the TSF to rescue his daughter. Of course, the longer they take to find her, the hungrier she'll get.

Double-Edged *(Time Travel):* The PCs are visiting first-century Rome, when suddenly one of their group disappears. It turns out that they've inadvertently changed time, and Achillia has just castrated one of the team member's male ancestors, wiping out the family line. The PCs have to return to the previous day and find a way to protect the man -- but without killing Achillia, which would have an even greater potential to cause paradoxes.

The Best Defense (Space): When one of the PCs (preferably one with the Lecherousness disadvantage) is called as an important witness in a case against Paula Chiang's employer, the corporation decides that the ideal solution is for the PC to temporarily disappear and for Paula Chiang to replace him. To do this, she'll have to get him alone before the trial, immobilize him, and steal his clothes.

If she succeeds, the other PCs will have to try to work out why their friend is different, and why his testimony has changed. If Paula escapes, the witness will have a lot of explaining to do -- and may be facing a perjury charge.

Pyramid Review

Megastar

Published by [Mayfair Games](#)

Designed by Friedemann Friese

Graphics by Maura

English language version by Robert S. Carty, Jr., Coleman Charlton, Pete Fenlon, Will Niebling, William Niebling, Larry Roznai, Guido Teuber, & Alex Yeager

92 cards (84 band, seven hit parade, one blank) & rules; full-color, boxed, two to five players; $10.00

Have you ever wanted to be front man for a band? Charge onstage, axe in hand, and thrill the crowd with your hard-rocking or rhythmic strumming? Maybe you can't live that dream, but with the *Megastar* card game from Mayfair, you can pretend you're in charge of a radio station that selects those bands for their outlet.

The object of the game is to have the most popular radio station in the city by playing the best and most requested bands for points.

A set of bands is lined up randomly in the center of the play area; this is the hit parade. The group at the top of this totem pole is currently the best-rated act on the charts, with second, third, and so on beneath that. Each of the acts has a set of 12 band cards that are mixed together to form the draw deck. Some of these are removed before each game so no one knows just how popular any given band might become.

Several band cards are dealt to the right of the hit parade, forming the music market. The area on the left is the request area, and it stands empty to begin with. Players get a hand of cards, place one facedown in front of them, and play begins. On his turn, the player reveals his facedown band and places it in the request area next to its matching hit parade card. Then he gets a new card from the music market and another from the draw deck, then lays out a new facedown card. Yes, that means the hands grow by one each turn, and unfortunately that's the easiest bit of math in the game.

If any band gets three requests, it triggers a countdown. Everyone gets shifted depending on how popular they are, and groups are adjudicated from the top spot to the last (which, when one thinks about it, is the reverse of how they count the hits down on the radio, but . . .). The band in the number one spot can't go anywhere (they're topping the charts, after all), but the ones beneath it can. For every request next to the band, they go up the chart one space. So for example, if the second most popular act has no cards next to it, they also stay put, but it only takes one request for it to go up a spot, displacing the first band into the number two slot -- and the other, as-yet not altered bands may shove it down further still. Request cards become part of the music market once the bands move.

When everything settles down, play continues. By the time the last deck card is drawn, players hopefully have a hand (called a playlist) that reflects what's most popular on the charts. The band that ends in the top spot gives players five points for every matching card in their hands, the number two spot gives four points per card, and so on. With smaller groups of players not all bands are used, but if the game group is big enough to employ all seven bands, the sixth and

seventh acts score nothing. The highest total has his finger on the pulse of the industry and wins.

The cards are a bit thin, but they don't see a lot of "standard" activity during play. The real test is going to be whether the coating on the cards holds up. The band cards get shifted about a lot as the corresponding hit parade cards slide up and down the billboard, so the smoother the playing surface the more mileage the user gets out of them. The illustrations are terrific, though, and every effort has been made to make each band distinct from the others: their "CD cover," the instrument in the corner (similar to a suit), and even a symbol to go with that (kind of like, well, a second suit). That's important because, alas, a few of these colors are surprisingly close. The purple bleeds into the mauve that matches the brown . . . even if you're not colorblind, you may do a double-take.

The mechanics sound nifty on paper, but it's kind of hard to pin down the strategy. The more players, the more there is to remember and anticipate, but with fewer players the fewer bands you can use . . . you get the feeling some of the game's "teeth" have been lost, and it's already not terribly involving. It doesn't take much to dislodge something popular, and the top-rated band could become the lowest of the low on a single countdown. To get a band into the top spot requires the same cards a player earns his score from (and theoretically it's that balancing act that's supposed to drive much of the game), but even if you get them there it's almost impossible to second-guess what the other players are going to do. They can easily remove a favored band without even working to do so.

You can improve your card-counting, memorization, and math skills with *Megastar* -- you'd *better* work on those abilities -- but much of the process seems random and arcane, and that tends to bleed a lot of the fun out of something intended to be so casual. A strategy guide of some sort to help the probability-impaired players cope would be a welcome download, but for now the game hasn't earned the spotlight.

--Andy Vetromile

In Search Of Suppressed Boston: 23 Questions Groping Toward Bisociation Darkly

"For know you, that your gold and marble city of wonder is only the sum of what you have seen and loved in youth. It is the glory of Boston's hillside roofs and western windows aflame with sunset, of the flower-fragrant Common and the great dome on the hill and the tangle of gables and chimneys in the violet valley where the many-bridged Charles flows drowsily. . . . Seek out your marvellous city and drive thence the recreant Great Ones, sending them back gently to those scenes which are of their own youth, and which wait uneasy for their return."
-- Nyarlathotep, in *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath,* by H.P. Lovecraft

Way back in the spring of 2004, the fine people at Pandemonium Books and Games in Cambridge, as befits a store named for the capital of Hell, asked me for a Suppressed Transmission on a Bostonian theme, while I was busily attending BookExpo America and writing about four other things. I agreed, but rather than bash out a pallid piece of hack work, I decided to present rather a work in progress. It was published in a lovely little pamphlet called *Underground Boston,* along with a terrifically creepy thing about spiders by our very own Jonathan Woodward. I've updated it for the Age of Wikipedia, and for one or two books that I've added to the old eliptony shelf since then. But as it did then, this piece still reflects, as closely as possible, the actual thought process (for want of a better term) that I go through while creating a Suppressed Transmission (or, say, an RPG campaign) about a given subject or setting. Hopefully, this look at the architectural drawings of the strange will be of some interest to those in the weirdness construction business themselves.

"It's my business to catch the overtones of the soul, and you won't find those in a parvenu set of artificial streets on made land. Back Bay isn't Boston -- it isn't anything yet, because it's had no time to pick up memories and attract local spirits. If there are any ghosts here, they're the tame ghosts of a salt marsh and a shallow cove; and I want human ghosts -- the ghosts of beings highly organized enough to have looked on hell and known the meaning of what they saw. The place for an artist to live is the North End . . . Don't you realize that places like that weren't merely made, but actually grew? Generation after generation lived and felt and died there, and in days when people weren't afraid to live and feel and die. . . . I can show you houses that have stood two centuries and a half and more; houses that have witnessed what would make a modern house crumble into powder."
-- Richard Upton Pickman, in "Pickman's Model," by H.P. Lovecraft

1. Okay, what do we know about Boston?

Puritans, which means witches, one devoutly hopes. Ben Franklin's birthplace. The Boston Tea Party, Paul Revere's Ride, and the Revolution. Transcendentalism. Poe's birthplace, and Nathaniel Hawthorne's stomping grounds. Lovecraft references, for header quotes, theme and feel. The Boston Strangler. The Big Dig, and those Pickmanian miles of tunnels and sewers underneath, going back four centuries. So far, we have a setting with a strong history, secret Masons (the Sons of Liberty were a Masonic lodge, essentially), and a hint of the numinous, plus dark places and a convenient harbor to drop bodies into. That's all good.

2. Are there ghosts in Boston?

According to Dennis William Hauck's *National Directory of Haunted Places,* there are two pleasant elderly women haunting the Boston Public Gardens (this doesn't seem very promising), a number of suicides and Satanic cultists in Charlesgate Hall in Back Bay (now we're cooking), a Lady in Black at Fort Warren on St. George's Island in the Harbor (aha!), and workers trying to get into Thayer Hall on the Harvard campus (a spectre is haunting Harvard . . .). This frankly doesn't seem enough to really build anything solid on, all told, but one or two of them might figure in somehow.

3. How about UFOs?

Rather than go through the indexes of fifty different books, or even Googling "Boston UFO," I reach out a long arm

for George Eberhart's indispensable *Geo-Bibliography of Anomalies.* It may be 26 years out of date, but it is the single best reference book for the budding Fortean GM, assuming she has the eighty bucks or whatever it costs. Each state or province in North America has its own chapter, subdivided by city or town, further subdivided by type of phenomenon. Not even looking at the suburbs, the entry for "Boston" is fourteen columns of six-point Courier type, from Alchemy to Witch trial (hex). I note, while paging through the entries looking for the UFO section, the alchemist George Starkey, and a "skyquake" in 1647, which just sounds cool. When we finally get past the seven-plus columns of Spirit Mediums (note to self -- look into that element if the game or column takes a strongly Transcendental turn), I find seven listed events, from 1641 (reported by John Winthrop in his diary) to 1972 (over Dorchester High School). There are two sightings in 1909, likely the [Airship], which returned around then.

4. What can Charles Fort tell us about Boston, if anything?

Not much. Of the four entries in the index to the *Books of Charles Fort,* one is the 1909 Airship sighting, one is a reference to the plane of Captain Mansell James, which disappeared over the Berkshires in 1913 while flying from Boston to New York, and one is a "phantom sniper" who injured three people in 1931. The fourth, however, is very interesting; in 1867 a fishing smack sailed out of Boston with a Portuguese sailor on board under the name "James Brown." Brown was discovered to be, well, a vampire, and President Andrew Johnson commuted his death sentence to life in prison. He was still alive -- in Federal custody -- in 1892. The possibilities are limited only by the lack of data, and the difficulty of Google searching on "James Brown" with any great efficacy. Have we stumbled on a Boston vampire cult? (In *Food For The Dead,* Michael Bell reports a -- similarly frustratingly undocumented -- "midnight cremation" in Boston in 1872 during the [New England vampire panic].) Federal vampire research in the 19th century? Robert Damon Schneck, in *The President's Vampire,* digs through the actual record to find not a vampire prisoner but a journalistic hoax. (Or was it all a cover-up? Hmmm.) Fort also has one index entry for "Boston, England," which reminds me that Boston takes its name umbilically from the Old World.

5. What about that "Boston, England," then?

It's in Lincolnshire. Wikipedia says its parish church has the highest steeple (nicknamed, with Midlands understatement, "the Stump") of any such church in England. Fort tells us about a fall of fish there in 1841, which seems pretty irrelevant. According to the Spencers' *Ghost Hunters' Guide to Britain,* there's a ghostly suicide that flings herself from "the Stump." St. Botolph provides the name for both Bostons, as said name is short for "St. Botolph's Stone."

6. So anything good about St. Botolph? He might be Boston's patron deity, after all.

Saxon saint (d. 680 A.D.) who founded a monastery called "Ox Island" (or "Ox Hill") in 654 A.D. His feast day is June 17th, and the *Catholic Encyclopedia* says he was exposed to the "molestations of evil spirits," which is nice and Lovecraftian. Interestingly, while Googling him, I notice that Ripper victim Catherine Eddowes was seen drunk near St. Botolph's Church, Aldgate, on the night of her murder. That church (also haunted, by a woman in the choir loft) was known as "Prostitute's Church," for what are probably obvious enough reasons.

7. Speaking of serial killers, what about the Boston Strangler?

Thirteen murders between 1962 and 1964; controversy remains over whether Albert DeSalvo was the killer in all (or any) of the cases. He may have also been the (evocatively named) "Green Man," a serial rapist in Connecticut. Rich, if highly charged and sensitive, material here for a horror game. For the conspiracy fan, DeSalvo served in an Army unit where (somewhat later) the CIA did MK-ULTRA mind control tests; one website calls him a "mind-controlled patsy."

8. So where were we?

The name of the city, and St. Botolph. The cow path streets, and the image of cows grazing on the Common in colonial times, call St. Botolph's "Ox Island" to mind, don't they? The first settler in Boston, William Blackstone, settled on the peninsula (which the Indians called *Shawmut,* which means, according to an unimpeachable source from 1822, "living fountains" -- God, I love Google) with a Brahma bull, which seems significant somehow. I think there's hidden Mithraism going on at the very least.

9. There's something about the city name you're holding back for a dramatic moment, isn't there?

I can conceal nothing from you. Boston (our Boston, not the English one) was first called "Trimountaine," after the three hills in the city, which triplicity should get everyone's ears pricked up. And to kick it up a notch, Google reveals to me that Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., let something slip in *The Professor at the Breakfast Table,* when he said that "The heart of the world beats under the three hills of Boston."

10. Jackpot.

You got it. If we had time, we'd research the life of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. and look for any kind of mystical, Masonic, or other influence that we can pretend came from the scions of the Sacred Geometers who laid out Boston's eerie leys.

11. So what are the three hills?

Not so fast. Two of them (Mount Vernon and Pemberton Hill) were leveled and dropped into the Charles River swamps to make Back Bay, and Beacon Hill was shortened into "the flat of the hill" -- which means that Back Bay is actually on "tamed water" in the Tim Powers sense. Remember our Pickman quote? Boston's power structure has cleverly insulated itself from magical attack by living in an artificial landmass, or by castrating the earth energies beneath it in a nod to the Attis cultists of Cybele.

12. Your talk of earth energies intrigues me.

I'd postulate a "dragon current" (perhaps the "living fountains" themselves) under the Old Boston (downtown and the North End), probably flowing from the Common and the Old Elm, along the old Neck to the maypole in Merrymount (Quincy) that Cotton Mather so hated. Someone has connected Thomas Morton's Merrymount to the Dragon Society of Reptoid cultists; maybe the Adamses, America's first political dynasty, were Reptoids. Obviously, the Big Dig is tied in here somewhere, if not with the ghouls. (And speaking of St. Botolph's Church, Aldgate, and chthonic energies, 5,000 bodies were buried in a plague pit in that churchyard in 1665.) If I had to guess, I'd say the obelisk on Breed's Hill at the Bunker Hill memorial is another power node in the dragon current.

13. Dragon current -- any connection to the Green Dragon Tavern?

Glad you asked. That North End tavern was the central lodge (St. Andrew's Lodge) of American Freemasonry. Dr. Joseph Warren was the Grand Master of the lodge; Paul Revere was its Senior Grand Deacon. Sam Adams (a possible Reptoid?) and John Hancock (the richest man in America) were also members. According to Masonic legend, it was the site where the Sons of Liberty planned the Boston Tea Party. The Masons dressed as "Mohawks" for the Party; this may have some connection to the mysterious Hell-Fire manque known as the "Mohocks" in London two generations earlier, or to the deep connection in the mind of Puritan New England between the Indians and the Devil.

14. So the Masons control the dragon current?

I think rather that they tried to impose their own Enlightenment grid onto it; the streets they built are Roman-style, not meandering cow paths like in Old Boston. Interestingly, the proto-Mason Sir Christopher Wren, who laid out the sacred geometry of London after the Fire, redesigned all three of St. Botolph's churches in London.

15. So what are the Masonic nodes, then?

Things like Faneuil Hall, Old North Church, things like that. Tremont Street is a definite ley line; its name comes from "Trimountaine." Fenway Park would be a ley nexus, if this were an *Unknown Armies* game. The Massachusetts State House, which Holmes Sr. famously dubbed "the Hub of the Universe," is very tempting.

16. Give in to temptation.

For some odd reason, the State House has a Sacred Cod in it, which has definite Dagon overtones. Also, the copper for

its dome was rolled in Paul Revere's foundry, and Sam Adams laid the cornerstone. How's that for your Masonic Hub? The architect, Charles Bulfinch, like the Swedenborgian Daniel Burnham in Chicago, the Masonic Christopher Wren in London, and the mystical Baron Hausmann in Paris, dabbled in [urban planning](). He designed something with the eerie name of Tontine Crescent, with its overtones of ritual murder for prosperity's sake. Bulfinch also renovated Faneuil Hall -- and designed the new U.S. Capitol Building for President (wait for it) John Quincy Adams. This is all from the *Rough Guide to Boston,* by the way; travel guides are better game books than 90% of all game books.

17. Surely you must have something more than a tour guide on Charles Bulfinch.

Surprisingly, no. David Ovason's *Secret Architecture of Our Nation's Capital,* which one would expect to be the mother lode on such things, only confirms (if that's the word I want) that Bulfinch was a Mason, and that he was fond of the eagle symbol. Wikipedia just gives lots more details on Bulfinch's life and career, although it confirms that he studied Wren churches while in England on a Grand Tour in 1785. Interestingly, though, we find from Wikipedia that Charles Bulfinch was the father of Thomas Bulfinch, of *Bulfinch's Mythology* fame. That's indicative, if not proof positive, of some sort of mythic or arcane study in the family.

18. Looks like that's a dead end for now. How about the witches?

Eberhart gives us four cases; Alice Lake and Margaret Jones in 1648 (both executed), Anne Hibbins (executed in 1655), and a mysterious Mrs. Glover (the "Witch Glover") in 1688, this one investigated by that Fox Mulder of the black buckle-hat, Cotton Mather. Googling on "Boston witches Lake Jones Glover" turns up a website indexing the cases from John Putnam Demos' *Entertaining Satan,* which I suppose I could have looked up myself. But anyhow, it gives us some more witches: Jane Hawkins (indicted in 1638), Elizabeth Kendall (executed in Cambridge in 1647), Winifred and Mary Holman (both acquitted in Cambridge in 1659), and Mary Hale (acquitted in Boston in 1681).

19. That was informative, but not very productive. What else you got?

Well, looking around in the tour books for more on Bulfinch, I noticed that some of Boston's older (alchemical?) windows turned amethyst with age and light. The purple eyes of the old houses no doubt indicate Something; according to the *Moon Handbook Massachusetts,* Ralph Waldo Emerson had a "House of Odd Windows." You've got to watch these Transcendentalists every second, I tell you.

20. With my purple eyes, no doubt.

The Amitabha Buddha has purple eyes. So does Aqualad. And Elizabeth Taylor. Somewhat more game-applicably, a Google search turns up this Robert W. Chambers quote, from "The King in Yellow": "A pretty girl gave him a glance from a pair of violet eyes. He did not see her, but she, catching her own reflection in a window, wondered at the color burning in her cheeks." It still doesn't mean much, but it could make an interesting background element in something. And note the mention of windows again. Maybe ghouls have purple eyes, or members of the secret Reptoid-Bulfinch Lineage -- it would make an interesting element to track through a game via portraits and such.

21. You've mentioned alchemy twice now. Spill.

The first American scientist, George Starkey, may have published alchemical works under the pseudonyms "Cosmopolita" and "Philalethes." He attended Harvard College, and attained the Philosopher's Stone in 1645 while living in Boston. John Winthrop the Younger studied alchemy in Constantinople around the same time before going on to found Connecticut. The adept Charles Morton (any relation to Merrymount Morton?), a Puritan alchemist (!!) emigrated to Massachusetts in 1686. He trained Dorchester-born Samuel Danforth (Harvard, Class of 1715), who in 1773 wrote to Benjamin Franklin, offering him a piece of the Philosopher's Stone. All of Danforth's books (except, no doubt, for certain eldritch and dubious tomes) are in the Boston Athenaeum library.

22. Nathaniel Hawthorne ties into witchcraft, doesn't he?

Yes, but Salem witchcraft; his ancestor John Hathorne was one of the trial judges. He also put alchemy into a lot of his books, from *The Scarlet Letter* to *The Marble Faun;* his short story "The May-Pole of Merry Mount" indicates some

knowledge of the dragon currents. Googling around shows that Hawthorne spent only about two or three years in Boston all told, which seems a shame, because he's way less utilized than Poe or Lovecraft, and in his own way just as creepy. It's probably still worth more research, especially if you can tie a Tim Powers style nephilim-vampire into the "marble faun" somehow. That can bring us back to our putative Federal vampire cult coverup, too.

23. If only we had the space. End with something really weird.

The "one if by land, two if by sea" signal from the Old North Church was actually a two-slit experiment designed to collapse the probability wave of the Revolution and force the British imperial Order to "fuzz out" into Revolutionary American Chaos. Hail Eris, Hail Revere!

Pyramid Review

Recess!

Published by **Atlas Games**

Designed by Morgan Dontanville

Illustrated by Alexander Bradley

Four Six-Inch Square Full Color Game Boards, Full Color Circular Clock Board With Pointer, Two Full Color Two-Inch Square L-Shaped Entrance Sections, Two Full Color Two-Inch Square Safety Squares, 10 Wooden Boy Figures In Five Colors, 10 Wooden Girl Figures In Five Colors, Two Black Nun Pawns, 50 Yellow Wooden Coin Tokens, & eight by 10-Inch Black & White Four Page Rulebook; $24.95

Although Atlas Games have published boardgames before, the company is better known for its card games and RPGs. *Recess!* is different in that it is not really aimed at the gaming hobby. In subject matter, it is designed for a broader, younger, and more family-friendly audience. Its components match that audience, evoking the feel of a European boardgame.

The setting for *Recess!* is a parochial school and its subject matter is, as the title suggests, the period between morning and afternoon school. The 30 minutes in which each child has to get across the playground, beat the snot out of the other children for their lunch money, and maybe even steal a kiss from a sweetheart, all while trying to avoid the baleful gaze of the Nuns. If a child's stiff-arm tactics gets noticed, or another child tattles on him, then detention will surely follow.

Designed for three to five players, aged eight and upwards, *Recess!* consists of four square board sections, marked in squares and with various pieces of playground equipment -- swings, slides, climbing frames, and so on; and a brightly colored turn counter that depicts a strict nun ruler in hand. This is the Recess! clock. Both figures representing the boy and girl pupils are done in wood and full color, as are the coins. The figures are also flat so that they can be easily laid down.

Game set-up is simple. The four board sections are placed to form a large square and the two safety squares placed at opposite corners. The two L-shaped entrance sections, one pink and one blue, are placed around the same corners. One nun starts the game on each of the safety squares and each player receives four figures, two of each gender, plus 10 coins. These enter the playground through the appropriately colored entrance section, blue for the boys, pink for the girls. The Recess! clock is set so that the game lasts exactly 30 turns. Finally, the starting player is always the one who has been at school the longest.

Each turn begins with the player moving the clock on by a minute and turning over the sand timer. This prevents anyone suffering from "analysis paralysis" and helps speed the game along with each turn lasting just a single minute. He then moves three of the four figures he controls in the following sequence: "3, 2, 1, Nun." That is, he can move one pupil exactly three spaces, the next two spaces, and the last, just one. The Nun can be moved any number of spaces. Children can be moved orthogonally, but not diagonally, and can change direction. The Nun cannot change direction. All movement is blocked by playground furniture.

When a Nun lands on a child, she shoves him onto an adjacent square. If a child lands on another of a different color, a fight ensues and the attacker forces the defender to the ground. Simply, the defending figure is laid flat with the

attacker standing on it. The defending player must give a coin to the attacker. On subsequent turns, the attacker can either move away or keep pinning the victim down and extracting more coins. As long as the attacker remains, his player reduces his movement sequence from "3, 2, 1, Nun" to "2, 1, Nun." Each further successful attacker reduces his movement sequence until the only thing a player can do is move the Nun.

However, a fight cannot be started in direct line of sight of a nun. Obstacles do block line of sight, but other children do not. A fight is broken up when a third child lands on the same square, forcing the other two apart. It also ends when a nun moves into line of sight of the fight, forcing the fight to either break up on the attacker's next turn or sending the attacking pupil to detention on the Safety square and losing his movement for a turn.

A game lasts until the Recess! clock runs out. It can end earlier if a player can bring a boy pupil and a girl pupil together onto the same square where they can steal a kiss. This must be out of sight of the nuns and rewards the player with two coins each from the other players. This usually wins that player the game, the overall aim being the player with the most coins at game's end.

If **Recess!** has any problems, it is in the plain nature of the rules, which also come in French, German, and Spanish. True, they are easy to understand, but illustrated examples would have made it much easier to grasp by both adults and younger players.

The game also feels almost like the background to each bout of Atlas Games' well-regarded card game of playground fights, ***[Lunch Money.](#)*** Indeed, if you wanted to, you could resolve every playground assault with a round of the card game. While that would give the victim player a greater chance to defend himself, it would also make the game much, much longer, and make it less suited to a younger audience.

When we played **Recess!,** we found that because the children were clumped around the corner entrances, it was very easy to start and end fights. It was not so much a melee, more a distraction while we tried to use the three-square move to make a run for the side areas away from the entrances where we might complete that oh-so-desired boy-girl meeting. Moving the nuns also became a means to protect your pupils rather than using them to attack other players by shoving pupils and breaking up rival fights. Having to move both pupils and the nuns in sequence does constrain choices, but that is the point of the game, and it does force a player to consider his tactical choices. The addition of the sand timer nicely counters any penchant for over analysis, plus it forces the game to be played at a pace almost like the impulsiveness of the children it depicts.

With a quick playing time, **Recess!** makes for a good starter or filler game. It even offers a little opportunity for table talk as the children scrap. It certainly provides tactical choice and comes with a theme that will be familiar to many. As a family game it is more tactical, and more obviously tactical, than most, although it tries to hide this under a fairly soft theme. In this, **Recess!** can serve as a stepping stone to harder edged and more thoughtful hobby games.

--Matthew Pook

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Fimhálsar

by Paul Drye

It's been more than four centuries since Scandinavians started colonizing the shores of North America. While Vinland has become an important nation, the process is far from complete. Midgard's great migration began while Europe was still behind the technology of Christopher Columbus, and without large sea-going vessels and gunpowder the continent's natives had a chance to regroup and slow the newcomers' advances. In 1412, the outer boundary of Vinland is only at the Mississippi to the west and the Great Lakes to the north. Near the corner of this angle is the new, up-and-coming city of Fimhálsar.

History

As outlined in *GURPS Alternate Earths 2,* Midgard's turning point was the Viking sack of Constantinople. One of its knock-on effects was more resources for the northern route to the New World, and Vinland was never abandoned. Most settlement has been on the coast, including the capital at Leifsholm, but the Gataström (St. Lawrence River) was an extremely useful water route into the interior. Towns sprung up along its length as far as the Island of Montreal where, like on Homeline, the Lachine Rapids blunted further exploration. The colonists could get smaller ships around them by portage, but generally didn't bother. The area beyond to the north and west became a sparsely populated marshland, Viking woods-runners mixing with the remaining native population to form a society of "Kvikindi," half-breeds that acted as the interface between their nominal Vinlander overlords and the Indian country beyond.

That country was rich in resources, including the traditional beaver pelts and copper. On the large island by the rapids, the same economics that developed Montreal on Homeline sparked Fimhálsar on Midgard. At first nothing more than a larger version of the other towns on the river, as western trade expanded Fimhálsar became by far the largest city in the northern interior. It cleared 11,000 people in the last decade.

All this growth comes at a time when the region is under stress. The Medieval Warm Period ended about a century ago, and the drop of a couple degrees Fahrenheit has been displacing people whose lives depended on plants and animals accustomed to warmer temperatures. Elders shake their heads at the snowfalls in Fimhálsar these days -- it used to be so much nicer when they were children. The younger generation think that's just typical oldster griping, but Homeliners know they're right.

As the town's rapid growth bumped up against the growing dislocations in the area, the local lords decided to invest in security. Forty years ago, the city took its largest leap forward when its permanent fortifications went up. For centuries Fimhálsar had relied on the river that surrounded it and a wooden palisade; now, the stone castle and walls of Hnífholt established that the area around the city had been permanently annexed by the Vinlanders.

Hnífholt

The enclosure is on Mount Royal (or, as the locals call it, Thokufell), running along the flat-topped ridge of the mountain. Altogether the walls circle an area about a thousand feet long, and anywhere from 50 to 100 feet wide. The strongpoint is a keep in the western end, while the majority is a single layer of dressed-stone wall, 15 feet tall and backed by an earth-and-timber palisade 10 feet deep. There is one route up to the top, and the local authorities have cut a ravine into the approach just before one reaches the walls. A wooden bridge, quite destructible, is the only way across and into the fort.

A couple of hundred people live within the walls, more when the spring and fall fur market is on; as well as the traders, there's extra men in the garrison to handle the flow of money and alcohol. The whole interior is filled with buildings, a crowded town supported by the surrounding farms. It's a typically medieval town to the dirt and smell. The most advanced attempt at sanitation is the main street running down the center of the ridge: it's paved with logs so it gets above the mud.

The town inside the walls is geared toward serving the occupants of the castle, which is to say the nobles and the garrison. Everyone who isn't doing that focuses on the closest thing Vinland has to finance, the long-term development of the interior trade. Traders oriented towards the Atlantic live down by the harbor instead.

While the fortified town is useful, the castle was the original point of Hnífholt, but the strongpoint may well be causing as much trouble as it solves. Many of the locals don't like what it represents, and in recent years they've been acting on that feeling.

Hafnar

"The Harbor," as its name literally translates, is the other urban part of Fimhálsar. Due south of Hnífholt on the shore of the island, it grew up on the placid basin at the foot of the rapids and is home to over half the town's population.

Hafnar is the commercial center of town, where almost all the shops and businesses may be found, as well as the warehouses containing the goods going out from and coming in to the region. There are also several establishments devoted to the needs of the guards who watch the most valuable items, beaver skins for export and tobacco and alcohol from the coast.

Most any TL3 and some TL4 items are available in Hafnar, though unusual items take a month or two to import after someone expresses a desire to buy.

The Steadings

The remaining population of the island, as well as quite a few people on the north and south shore of the river, are farmsteaders. Steadings are dominated by two longhouses, one for the extended family and one for livestock, and a number of outbuildings. The fields are large, as the island's soil is mostly clay -- the lands along the Gataström have long been outstripped by the ones along the Mississippi or southeast in the equivalent of the Homeline Carolinas. Most farms specialize in wheat with plenty of barley and oats. Lucky farmers with the right soil and exposure to the sun will grow some hops or tobacco, and vault in wealth because they find ready trading with their neighbors.

The word "stead" has a particular meaning in the Vinlander tongue, implying that the land is not held free-and-clear. In theory, all the land belongs to the king and the nobility, but for all of Vinland's history this has been nominal. Labor is at a premium in this vast continent, and the deals struck to attract settlers have left government controls very loose. Apart from several obligations and tithes that run about one percent of a farm's output, Vinlanders ignore their overlords.

This is changing around Hnífholt. The newer of the two families running Fimhálsar are using the old legal rules to tighten their control over the region. Customary inheritances and the like are sometimes denied when the nobles think they can get away with it. It's becoming clear to some that they are trying to get people used to the idea so it can be

used more often in future. Fimhálsar itself has been safe from these pressures so far, but the people in the outlands have had enough.

The Waenda Rebellion

The Norse have been in contact with the Waenda (in Homeline terms, the Hurons) since the 11th century, but it's only in the last few generations that the natives have been transformed from an associated nation to subjects. They and the half-Scandinavian, half-Huron Kvikindi are organized in a loose confederation of tribes, faring deep into the continent to trade Scandinavian goods to more distant natives and bringing back their riches for more goods. It's been a pretty good position, but the powers back in Leifsholm have come to the conclusion that it's no longer necessary to keep the Waenda in the middle now that Vinlander control is cemented.

In the past couple of decades, there have been numerous rulings from Hnífholt's rulers that have gone against the natives. Old treaties have been disregarded, and dishonorable traders from the south -- long established on the routes to Kahaukja and Theneyland -- have pushed north. Meanwhile, several properties and sinecures have been disposed in favor of Hnífholt's powerful -- and using ways that are legal-but-not-customary.

The Waenda responded by breaking into rebellion (or, from their standpoint, defending their independence) three years ago. The land to the north of the Five Lakes and the river as far as Fimhálsar is in their hands, though the Vinlanders can and do send expeditions to assert local control for a while. Both sides think Fimhálsar is the key to victory: as long as Vinlanders hold it, they can't be defeated permanently. The rebels have the advantage of space to maneuver and distance from the centers of power, but they're hampered by a lack of ruthlessness. The regular people living in Fimhálsar are more like hostages to the Hnífholters and the court back in Leifsholm than enemies of the Waenda, given the long-established links between the city and the lands to its west.

The Lords

Opposing the Waenda are two intermarried families, the Gellir and the Austmathr. The Austmathr are the new power in the city, founded by Utirik Sveinsson. Exiled from the other end of the Viking world for murky reasons, he's soared from being a penniless arrival to the leadership of a new clan in the last 40 years. Still alive, though over 70 now, his sons and daughters are an utterly ruthless faction in the northwest's politics. They are the ones pushing their old legal rights, and the Waenda, most strenuously.

The Gellir are the old money of Fimhálsar. Descended from one of the first families to settle in the region, and specifically descended from a distaff branch that found the mines 15 miles to the east of the town, which produce cheap gems like garnet and zircons, pyrite for flint strikers, and lead. While not as active as the Austmathr, they've followed their lead in recent events, greedy for more to control.

As well as being rich, leading numerous men, and holding much property, the lords of Fimhálsar have the advantage of being law-speakers. They have the time and resources to learn Vinland's laws backwards and forwards, which gives them an edge in any proceedings. In theory anyone can resort to violence and counter-violence in a dispute, but in time-honored fashion the Vinlanders usually submit to the will of the local *theng*. Every year, it will meet in Fimhálsar to settle lawsuits in the region. Profoundly conservative, the theng usually rules in the favor of whoever can muster the right precedents. This is invariably a member of either the Austmathr or the Gellir. Only cases where they end up against each other are ever in much doubt.

Bondsmen

The changing climate and Inuit expansion have severely affected the Greenland colony, with more than half its population emigrating to Iceland or Vinland. There are a couple of thousand ex-Greenlanders strung along the river, many in Fimhálsar. Almost all are in dire economic straits, and make up an underclass of poor and indentured servants. They're viewed with suspicion by most Vinlanders, and denied the vote and equal access to justice. In return,

many of them have been acting as a fifth column for the Waenda, which perpetuates the cycle of mutual antagonism with the Vinlanders.

Everyday People

Like any pre-industrial society, most people are poor or just getting by. Vinland's bounty has led to the development of a richer nobility (which Iceland never really developed on Homeline, and Scandinavia did only belatedly), but the difference is still smaller than is typical throughout the world. Looking at a noble or peasant, the group to which he belongs is not immediately obvious.

That said, farmers and typical merchants dress and act a particular way. While the shores of the Gataström are nicer on average than the Scandinavian core lands, they're still quite cool and wet, and northern Vinlanders have stuck to the typically Scandinavian snug, woolen and linen clothing. Men wear pants, while women wear dresses; women without servants wear an apron over that. Everyone wears a cloak, and during the winter the cloak has a hood. Bright dyes are *de rigeur* for all but the very poorest, though the Hvitakrister Christians -- a large fraction of the lower class and women -- often mute this down as a sign of piety.

Richer people are distinguishable by dress only through their ornaments. Everyone wears numerous objects threaded through loops in the clothes -- pockets and pouches not being part of Vinlander fashion. Average people wear practical objects like pipes and cutlery, with a few pieces of jewelry. The rich avoid the practical as a sign that they have servants and followers who will carry them instead.

Almost everyone, even people living in town, farm and raise livestock. In the urban areas of Fimhálsar this is vegetables along with rabbits or chickens, but on the farms it's cows, sheep, and wheat, the ruling triumvirate of Vinlander cuisine. Vinlanders have also acquired a taste for wild rice, introduced to them by the natives. Corn (maize) is considered food for animals.

Characters

Beinir Folkmarsson: There are many timelines that are echoes, and people on those lines who bear the same names and lives as historical figures on Homeline. Beinir Folkmarsson is an example of a less-common phenomenon, the personal echo: a person with many points of correspondence to a Homeline figure, but on a divergent timeline with no obvious reason for the connection.

Beinir is one of the most well-known personal echoes because his doppelganger is famous himself, Benjamin Franklin. He's been intensively studied, though there's currently a moratorium on that activity since Beinir is a very sharp fellow, and started to wonder about all the not-quite-right visitors he received from afar.

Like his Homeline equivalent, Folkmarsson is a writer, printer, and natural philosopher. He's one of the best known print-skalds in Vinland, or he would be if writing satire weren't life-threatening in this world: his pseudonymous "Scold of the North" is the one with the fame. The details of his life are similar to Franklin's too: the youngest son of an Icelandic immigrant, apprenticed in Leifsholm before jumping his indenture to come to Fimhálsar. There he set up shop as a printer and set up house with a widow whose husband had disappeared while on a raid to the south..

Now 37, he is a popular man in the city, particularly with women. When not working at his print shop or experiments, he can be found at one of several local halls, drinking and engaging in wide-ranging conversations.

Beinir is 5'10" tall, and weighs 190 pounds. His hair is light brown, long and loose, though he is starting to go bald. His eyes are gray.

Jessu Thorsson: The key figure in the Waenda Rebellion, Thorsson is the greatly feared "King of the Kvikindi" to his enemies. Before him, the widely distributed Waenda and Kvikindi were never able to ally against Vinland. His charisma and message have overcome the barriers of distance and thin settlement.

His unusual name is a clue to how he does it. He preaches a new mix of Thorism and Christianity, with himself as its prophet. His Vinlander father disappeared before he was born, and Jessu claims he was sired by Thor himself. After his Waenda mother died in his teens, he assumed the personal name Jessu, which is Vinlander for "Jesus." He actively teaches, and sincerely believes, that he is the Second Coming.

While his new religion hasn't swept his people entirely, it's become the sinews of the rebellion. With his followers fired up against Babylon (which is pretty much any power that gets in Thorsson's way), they can pull the rest of the Waenda and Kvikindi along on hopes of renewed freedom.

Jessu is a half-Scandinavian, half-Native American man, 6'3" in height and weighing 225lbs. He has long, coarse, brown hair. In imitation of the Byzantine tradition of Christ's appearance, he keeps meticulously shaven.

Runa Utiriksdottir: As her father's mental capacities have faded the last few years, "The Gray Lady" has become the de facto leader of the Austmathr clan, and so the most important political figure in Fimhálsar.

Runa is greatly feared. She is extremely harsh in her speech and behavior, and no-one dares call her on it. She is unmarried, and is rumored to be a virgin, but the last person to connect her personal life to her personality ended up dead in the Gataström missing two favorite organs. She was exiled by the theng, then several of its leading figures were murdered while she wasn't even in the region. After that she returned to Fimhálsar and is rarely challenged.

She is a Scandinavian female, 5'5" and 140lbs. She has long black hair, which she keeps covered with a head scarf. This is the Vinlander signal that a woman in married, so why she does this is unknown, or at least not widely distributed.

Taretandeh: A shepherd of what's left of the native Sturgeon tribe around Lake Champlain (*Fingravatn* in Vinlander), Taretandeh was once a wide-ranging traveler, who can tell people much about the lands around Fimhálsar. Unfortunately, he is a hermit of the first order, refusing to interact with others and staying high in the hills with his small flock. Local legend is that he retired home from his travels quite well-off, only to have his shoreline lodge destroyed and his family killed by some aquatic monster. Certainly he exhibits an unhealthy fear of open water.

He is a Native American man, 5'7" tall and 110lbs. His hair is black streaked with gray, very long and stringy. He presents as a nervous wreck, avoiding conversation and eye contact while muttering to himself and shying away from nothing,

Infinity and Fimhálsar

Infinity's agents consider Midgard a safe timeline -- which is not to say there isn't danger if one goes looking. The agents may leave it alone, but the town is of interest to White Star Trading, which most wants beaver pelts (beavers being protected animals on Homeline) and the local wool. Though superseded by water-repellent man-made cloth at home, Vinlander wool is used for agent costumes on low-tech worlds, and is a major trade item to pre-industrial timelines as well: descended from Icelandic sheep that grow fibers heavy in lanolin, Vinlander wool is prized by seamen and inhabitants of rainy climates alike.

Adventure Seeds

Git Along Little Woolies: The people in the low mountains both north and south of Fimhálsar engage in transhumance -- moving livestock from slopes to valleys on the changing of the seasons. Those moved are primarily sheep, and their meat and wool are most of the wealth of these peasants. Either because they've come to know the hill people (perhaps while investigating the Gellir mines), or to frustrate the lords putting pressure on them, the adventurers get to help move several dozen sheep from high to low more than a dozen miles.

It's Not What You Know, It's Who: The travelers come across an out-of-the-way location with the air of death about it in the course of some other task. It could be a grave and makeshift memorial, or a small, valueless shipwreck

with a skeleton within, among other possibilities. Once the adventure is over and they've returned to Fimhálsar, this encounter becomes known through casual gossip.

Not long after, violence comes to visit them. It gradually becomes clear that Runa Utiriksdottir is extremely angry that the outlanders have come across what they have.

No You Can't Have A Gun . . . Not Yours: There has been a recent upswing in Waenda successes against Fimhálsar's defenders, and it seems that somehow they are getting their hands on Outtime copies of powerful (if TL-appropriate) weapons. White Star Trading puts pressure on Infinity's law enforcement to look into it, and guess who draws the short straw?

Wise Man Bearing Gifts: Beinir Folkmarsson is notably well-spoken and flattering when he wants to be. The lords of Fimhálsar have charged him with a peacemaking trip to Jessu Thorsson's encampment upstream from Niagara Falls. It's a long and arduous journey, and it only gets more dangerous once he reaches the mercurial chieftain. Beinir rightly fears that the Austmathr want to sabotage his mission, and have only agreed to it for appearance's sake. Outlander companions may be the best option when he can't trust anyone in Fimhálsar to not back his noble foes.

Using Fimhálsar in Other Settings

Viking Montreal depends on its particular time and place, making it difficult to integrate into other kinds of campaigns. However, it does point the way toward a wrinkle that most fantasy settings don't have. There was quite a bit of exploration and colonization in the European Middle Ages, it's just that it gets forgotten in the wake of Christopher Columbus and followers.

The Vikings are popularly categorized as raiders, and that's a fair charge -- Western Europe teetered on the brink of collapse when they hit the north while the Magyars and Arabs triple-teamed it to the south and east. It's more accurate to say, though, that *viking* was four activities as well as raiding, it was trading, conquering, and colonizing.

Consider: Early medieval Scandinavians discovered Greenland, Newfoundland, and Jan Mayen, They may have discovered Svalbard, and were the first major colonists of Iceland. Russia from the Baltic to the Ukraine had Northman nobility imposed on it. The Channel coast of France was ruled by them and their ancestors until the 13th century, and they displaced the populations of the Faeroes, Orkney, and Shetland. They brought the coasts of the Irish Sea to heel; Sweyn Forkbeard later took all of England. Recognizable offshoots then conquered southern Italy, took England a second time, and helped wrest the Levantine coast from the Seljuks and Fatimids. Very few fantasy Northmen reflect those aspects of what were the most successful conquerors and colonizers in medieval European history.

So Fimhálsar is an avenue for exploring the expansionist parts of fantasy cultures without losing the setting's medieval feel. Many games have something like the Vikings in them somewhere; you are perfectly justified to move some of them out of their frozen homes into the bulk of the fantasy world, either as an alien set of rulers in a distant land, or as trader/colonizers in any region that hasn't a centralized government to keep them out.

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

More Game, More Toys, More Knowledge (Part I)

This week we're making column goulash, letting it simmer for a couple of weeks, and seeing what conclusion we have in a future column. (I already have the Soup Starter of this forthcoming column in the crockpot, ready and waiting.)

Okay; what elements are we looking at this week?

Element One:

In a lot of ways, I have usually spent time looking for ways to make my gaming more transparent from its gamerly roots. In many circumstances, I enjoy minimal dice rolling, freeform acting, in-character props and challenges, long walks on the beach, pina coladas, getting caught in the rain . . . wait, I digress.

Anyway, I enjoy that kind of stuff. However, in a lot of ways the trend for the past few years has been for many games to become *less* transparent, and more obviously a game. As one example, the ***d20 System*** strikes me at its core as a computer game in pencil-and-paper form (complete with a deep-bass voice bellowing, "Power **UP!**" whenever a new level is acquired). As another clear example, I note the global appeal of MMORPGs such as ***World of Warcraft,*** which attracts many of those who might otherwise be tabletop gamers, even though (or perhaps because) it emphasizes the game elements over the roleplaying aspects.

Element Two:

A certain part of me cringes as a GM whenever the players don't end up using their one-use goodies, especially if they're the sort of thing that are going to replenish or the PCs are likely to encounter again. Whether it's Luck Points, potions, favors, spells, and so on, it's hard to make the players feel like their characters are truly against the wall when they still have dozens of useful options or second chances (even if they're willing to let their characters die because they didn't understand the gravity of the threat until it was too late to use those goodies). I have a theory as to why this is, but I'll let is stew a bit longer before revealing it.

Element Three:

One thing that's always struck me about the efforts to render gaming as more cinematic or literary is the duality of what players are attempting to recreate. Oftentimes, such gamers want to experience both the experience of the characters and the experience of reading a book or watching a movie. Of course, the difference between the two is the difference between reading about the Dutch boy and putting your fingers in random . . . er, nevermind.

Probably the biggest single difference between those two realms is the audience's knowledge about when something will end versus the characters' lack of that same information. When consuming an entertainment option, we usually have a good idea about when it will end; through many years of observation we know when the midpoint of a 60-minute television show should be, when the climax of a two-hour movie is, and about how many pages the denouement will take up in a novel. But gamers seldom have this information . . . which is accurate from the point of view of the characters, but not to emulate those experiencing an entertainment medium.

There are some attempts to introduce elements from the audience side into the gaming world. Probably the biggest common example is the idea of soundtracks. (Presumably most people fighting for their lives in a tyrannical sci-fi universe do *not* hear the crashing sounds of a John Williams score as something exciting happens.)

Another common example is the Act/Scene structure of some games; again, most people don't know when they've changed scenes, and the only time someone is likely to use "Act II" in their real life is when it's followed by someone else saying, "Gesundheit!" (Ba-dum-bum . . .)

Okay; all the ingredients are in place. Can we mix all together and crank it up a notch?

One thing I experimented with in my *Star Trek* campaign was making sure the players were reminded constantly that they were "in" a *Star Trek* television series. To that end, I tried to structure adventures around the notion that they were episodes; each adventure began with pre-written scripts that led into the "first commercial break," followed by the episode's title (in the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* font, of course), and all the Acts were structured to end on some kind of cliffhanger, so that each "commercial break" would end with the "ominous horns" of the soundtrack. So successful were these techniques that I threw the players for a loop by making the last two "episodes" a two-parter, so that when the final cliffhanger occurred toward the end of the gaming session and I held up the pre-printed "To Be Continued . . ." sign, they almost fell out of their chairs.

Which seems as good a note as any to end this column.

--Steven Marsh

Breaking News

Political Fault Lines in *Transhuman Space*

by William H. Stoddard

The ***Transhuman Space*** setting includes a carefully worked out set of geopolitical relationships, designed around the concept of a balance of power. Half a dozen great powers share the leading role on the stage of the world: three single states, China, India, and the United States; and three multilateral alliances, the European Union, the Pacific Rim Alliance, and the Transpacific Socialist Alliance. Several lesser alliances have regional leadership roles, and a few unaligned states are also regional powers.

But even though the system looks stable, it has the potential for change. Hidden forces move nations to seek new alliances, or resist them. Seeing through the surface of the political landscape to the geopolitical stresses that create it reveals possibilities of drama -- and possible dramatic roles for adventurers who get caught up by the changes, or help create them, as diplomats, spies, or mercenaries.

The Existing Alliances

The world of 2100 A.D. has 10 multinational alliances. Based on the power ratings of their member states, these fall into three groups:

Blocs. Several alliances are actually based on a single state that is powerful enough to operate on its own, plus a few far weaker states that have special ties to it. China, India, and the United States all head such blocs. Russia, though much weaker that any of them, heads a fourth regional block in Eastern Europe and central Asia. In each of these blocs, the core state has virtually all the economic and military power. The smaller states are strategic assets; for example, the Ecuadorian spaceport handles most of space traffic of the United States.

Within the Pacific Rim Alliance, Australia is effectively the head of a similar bloc. East Timor and Maluku Selantan, both split off from Indonesia, are Australian client states in much the same way that Kachin and the Shan Republic, split off from Burma, are Chinese client states. The western half of New Guinea was also formerly part of Indonesia, and New Guinea as a whole is closely allied with Australia.

Dominated Alliances. Several alliances consist of one powerful state, together with a number of smaller states that together are roughly equally powerful. The Dominican Republic plays this role in the Caribbean Union, Saudi Arabia in the Islamic Caliphate, and South Africa in the South African Coalition. The leading state can't have things all its own way; it has to sell things to its partners through negotiation, and be prepared to give way on some issues. On the other hand, it gains a significantly greater influence on world politics, roughly doubling its effective power. It may not be accidental that the leaders of these three alliances are relatively small powers that can benefit from having clients.

Multilateral Alliances. On the other hand, the most powerful alliances are those with several strong member states. The European Union's core states are France and Germany; the Pacific Rim Alliance's are Japan and Korea; the Transpacific Socialist Alliance's is Indonesia. In each case, several major second-tier powers add population, wealth, or military strength to the alliance. The degree of internal integration varies, from the tight cultural bonds of Europe to the purely strategic cooperation of the Pacific Rim states, but each of these alliances has to work out its unified policies through negotiation.

The Unaligned States

These 10 alliances leave a substantial part of the world's nations on their own. Unaligned nations have three basic

options. They can continue to go it alone, they can negotiate to join existing alliances, or they can work to found new alliances.

The creation of an effective alliance has four main requirements. First, the potential allies have to be able to trade and communicate. Usually this means that they need to be close together geographically, but seagoing nations can form bonds across the oceans. The American Bloc, the Pacific Rim Alliance, and the Transpacific Socialist Alliance all depend on such bonds, and several of the European Union's member states are in North America and linked to Europe by the sea lanes. Second, they need to have a common concern, whether economic and political self-interest (as in the Pacific Rim Alliance), ideology (as in the Transpacific Socialist Alliance), or shared culture (as in the European Union -- though it also has economic interests and a shared ideology of preservationism). Third, they need to have effective leadership, and one or more states that can exercise it. Finally, they need a reason for other states to accept the leaders, rather than splitting off. This last issue works against alliances of two equal states; it's too easy for either state to deal with conflicts by breaking the alliance. Multilateral alliances mean that breakaway states lose many useful ties, not just one, and thus are more stable.

Several of the world's unaligned regions have states that are seeking to join existing alliances, or start new ones.

Europe. Europe is the least fertile region for new alliances. Only three European states of any significance remain outside of existing alliances: Koenigsberg, Switzerland, and Ukraine.

Switzerland already has a close alliance with the European Union; for example, it's a headquarters site for the Genetic Regulatory Agency. A growing minority of younger Swiss regard their country's refusal of formal alliances as archaic, but for the present the majority prefer it that way. Two members of the European Parliament are working out a proposal to offer Switzerland internal autonomy (including the all-important banking privacy) like that of Taiwan in China; this might tempt the Swiss, but whether the European administration would accept it is a different question.

Koenigsberg, as a free city, is doing very well as a middleman between Europe and Russia. Ukraine is less well off, but allying with either of its bigger neighbors would weaken its ability to bargain with both of them. Unless Russia joins the European Union, this is unlikely to change.

Asia. Pakistan is Asia's strongest unaligned nation, and could certainly benefit from alliances, given its long-standing conflict with India. Unfortunately, there are no very good prospects. Some Pakistanis favor joining the Islamic Caliphate, with which they share a common faith. Pakistan's history of sponsoring terrorism inside the Caliphate is an obstacle to this; so is Saudi Arabia's caution about admitting a new member that rivals its wealth and power. Within the Pakistani elite, especially its intelligence forces, there is support for a coalition with Iran, which has a similarly authoritarian government that subordinates Muslim beliefs to economic modernization; this might be enough to overcome the religious split between Shi'a Iran and Sunni Pakistan. However, the prospective junior partners, including Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, really aren't enough of an asset to stabilize a lasting union. If the two countries do join together it may be only temporary.

Israel, Mongolia, and Singapore are all isolated and likely to remain so. Singapore is doing very well as a middleman between the Transpacific Socialist Alliance and the rest of the world.

Africa. Nigeria would like to become the leader of a new African alliance, centered in West Africa, as a rival to the South African Coalition, whose expansion most Nigerian leaders oppose. The addition of Gabon to the Coalition is an especially sore point. But Nigeria is in a poor position to assume leadership. Its own internal divisions between the Muslim and preservationist north and the Christian and transhumanist south place it constantly on the edge of civil war. Its Muslim factions would really prefer to join some larger Islamic alliance, which would plunge the country into chaos. And Nigeria's strong-arm approach to regional diplomacy has made it few friends.

In fact, two of its stronger neighbors, Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana, are currently working toward a new regional alliance, the West African Union. Participants in the talks include Burkina Faso, Casamance, Gambia, Guinea, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo; a union of these countries would have wealth and armed forces comparable to Nigeria's. Nigeria is aware of the negotiations, though they have not been formally announced, and is bargaining with Mali and Niger over forming a regional union to manage the Niger River. On the other hand, Mali has ties with Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana

and could well join the West African Union, as could Nigeria's western neighbor Benin.

Further to the north, both Algeria and Egypt are active opponents of the Islamic Caliphate, and would like to create a regional alliance in the Maghreb to rival it. Inconveniently, the two states between them, Libya and Tunisia, both have ties to the European Union, and Libya is also favorable to the Caliphate, as is the western Maghreb nation of Morocco. Bringing in Libya, and perhaps Sahel nations such as Chad, Mali, and Mauretania, might produce a viable coalition, but is rather a long shot. Radical Nigerian Muslims have sought allies in Egypt and Algeria, but neither country wants to get drawn into a civil war.

On the Horn of Africa, both Eritrea and Somalia are sympathetic to the Islamic Caliphate and could easily join it.

Both in Nigeria and in its West African rivals, nanosocialist agitators from Madagascar are active. But geopolitically, the rest of the Alliance would have little support to offer any tropical African nation.

The Americas. In many ways, Central and South America ought to be the perfect site for a new regional alliance. They have two large states, Brazil and Mexico, both of which are on the lower rim of Earth's major powers. Working together, they ought to be able to form a hemispheric coalition, and editorialists regularly ask why they can't see the advantages of doing so.

The big obstacle is that too much of the area is already tied to other alliances. Mexico is cut off from the unaligned south by the Transpacific Socialist Alliance nations in Central America, and its major internal ideological movement is sympathetic to nanosocialism. Brazil has the power to dominate a South American Coalition, but it has enough differences from its neighbors to make them cautious about such a relationship, including its rain forest ecology, plantation-based economic traditions, and even its use of Portuguese rather than Spanish. Brazil's image with its neighbors hasn't always been good, either; an "ugly Brazilian" stereotype has emerged. Brazil might be able to create a Brazilian Bloc if it found one or two suitable junior partners.

Several South American nations have prospects of joining existing alliances. Chile has a prosperous Fifth Wave economy and an adversarial relationship with Bolivia and Peru, both members of the Transpacific Socialist Alliance. Chile's government has applied for membership in the Pacific Rim Alliance, which is expected to accept soon.

Argentina and Uruguay, in the meantime, are negotiating with the European Union. Both countries have almost entirely European populations and maintain European cultural traditions. Turkey is cautious about supporting their membership, partly because Argentina is just a little stronger than it is and would dilute its influence on Europe, and the United Kingdom is equally cautious, wanting to make sure that the Falkland Islands remain secure. But in the long run these questions can almost certainly be settled, taking the European Union a step closer toward becoming a world government.

If Mexico is unable to control its radical nanosocialist rebels, it could go over to the Transpacific Socialist Alliance. This would severely destabilize its relationship with the United States. The current government is very concerned to avoid this, as its American ties are one of Mexico's greatest assets.

The Pacific. Only one important state remains unaligned in the Pacific Ocean. New Zealand has close ties with the Pacific Rim Alliance, but has never formally joined it. Ideologically New Zealand is strongly preservationist, which does not fit well with the beliefs of most Pacific Rim states. A new movement has recently emerged in New Zealand politics: "correspondent societies" seeking closer bonds with English-speaking communities in the United Kingdom, Newfoundland, and the Maritimes, looking toward eventually joining the European Union.

Naturally, this looks very chancy to many Europeans; even in 2100, the logistics of defending a member state on the far side of the world could be a problem. However, most of New Zealand's neighbors are Pacific Rim Alliance members who are unlikely to seek conflict with Europe. And Europe already has commitments in French Polynesia, which aren't about to go away. It's quite possible that in a decade or so, New Zealand could formally ask to join -- and be accepted.

Broken and Shifting Alliances

Most of the existing alliances are fairly stable. In particular, neither the dominated nor the multilateral alliances have seriously unhappy members. Only two of the ten alliances offer some prospect of breaking up.

The Pacific Rim Alliance has a number of small island microstates as minor members, of which the most powerful is Fiji. A movement has begun to emerge on these islands that calls for a common governmental framework suited to their special needs, as opposed to their simply being unimportant members of an alliance of larger states. Many advocates call for bringing other islands that are currently part of the American Bloc (such as Micronesia) or the European Union (such as French Polynesia) into the same framework. The idea has begun to gain support on those islands as well. The movement looks toward the formation of a Pacific Islands Union modeled on the Caribbean Union, a similar alliance of small states.

If this alliance should come into being, it would probably do so peacefully. None of the major powers that have interests in Polynesia or Micronesia has a sufficiently urgent need for this territory to justify military intervention. This might change, though, if the proposed union came under the influence of the Transpacific Socialist Alliance, or if the American states of Guam and Hawaii moved toward joining it.

The Russian Bloc includes several central Asian states where Russian and Muslim populations are in conflict. If Muslim political movements gained power, they might want to break their ties to Russia. This separation would almost surely not be peaceful; see Voices Prophesying War, below.

The biggest potential shift in alliances would be India's going nanosocialist, and seeking to join the Transpacific Socialist Alliance. Openly, leaders of the TSA advocate this change. Privately, some of them will admit to reservations. India, by itself, has more people, more wealth, and more military strength than the entire existing alliance. Inevitably, it would become the leading nanosocialist power, diminishing the leadership roles of Indonesia and its smaller allies.

Within India itself, there are similar conflicts. Indian political traditions have long leaned toward socialism. However, one of India's most productive industries, and a major source of economic growth, is the entertainment media of Bollywood, which depend on strongly enforced intellectual property law for their profits. And that same industry employs some of the world's most skilled memetic design engineers. It's not an accident that Bollywood cranks out an endless series of adventure stories about heroic operatives thwarting TSA plots. A nanosocialist India is another of those geopolitical ideas that look as if they ought to happen, but that on closer examination seem increasingly hard to bring off.

Voices Prophesying War

The ultimate demonstration of international instability, and the ultimate source of new international alliances, is war. War could break out on a variety of scales in the current geopolitical system. Here are some possibilities for such outbreaks:

The Central Asian War. Iran and Pakistan agree on an alliance, and turn their efforts to fomenting rebellion in the Russian Bloc states with Muslim populations. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan experience Muslim seizures of power and apply for membership in the new alliance. Russia sends in military aid -- but both Iran and Pakistan have stronger armies than Russia has. Troops from the European Union come in to protect Russian soil, but not to preserve Russia's rule of its client states.

The Andean War. With the growing number of South American states incorporated into larger alliances -- Argentina and Uruguay in the European Union, Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru in the Transpacific Socialist Alliance, Chile in the Pacific Rim Alliance, and Ecuador in the American Bloc -- the region becomes increasingly tense. The completion of the Kenya Beanstalk makes matters worse, as commercial traffic through Quito Spaceport falls off sharply, plunging South America into a depression. Eventually a trigger incident, minor in itself, plunges the continent into general

warfare, with American and PRA forces against TSA forces.

The Equatorial War. This starts off the same way as the Andean War, but a wider system of alliances turns it into conflict on a world scale. Radical nanosocialist takeovers in Mexico, Nigeria, and India spark general fears of global revolution. Nigeria's repressive treatment of its Christian and pagan populations brings reprisals from the West African Union, supported by Brazil and the Caribbean Union, which also have many adherents of voudoun and kindred faiths. The Islamic Caliphate favors the Nigerians; the Central Asian Federation, hostile to both the Caliphate and India, comes in on the other side. The likely result is a total rearrangement of the alliance system, as drastic as the one that replaced European global domination with the Cold War, with the leaders of the winning side emerging as the new dominant powers. Alert memeticists are well aware of the chance to shape the world's future, but they have to be riding the right tiger.

Campaign Seeds

All these potential changes and conflicts offer a starting place for scenarios and campaigns. Here are a few examples of things that could be done in the Transhuman Space setting.

Schism: Romania, a member of the European Union, has a relatively poor economy, and many Romanians are unhappy with their situation. A growing movement advocates separation from the European Union, largely to get out from under the Genetic Regulatory Agency so that Romania can upgrade its economy with bioroid labor. Many European Union officials belief that Romania no longer has the right to do this, but keeping it in by force would be bitterly unpopular.

To worsen the potential conflict, the nation of Moldova, part of the Russian Bloc, has old ties to Romania, though it was forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union in the 20th century. Many Romanians advocate reunion, and so do a few Moldovans; an independent Romania might push hard for it.

Several different organizations might hire agents to head off the movement: Russia, the European Union, or the Genetic Regulatory Agency. They could select any kind of agents from old-fashioned covert operatives to subtle memetic engineers and researchers. If things go really badly, they could even send in soldiers.

Popular movements are also possible. What if citizens of the European Union start to boycott Romanian products, as a protest against Romania's intent to deal in bioroid slave labor? Conversely, what if other European nations demand a loosening of genetic regulation, and threaten to go the way of Romania if they don't get it? Greece, in particular, has strong popular support for genetic enhancement of children, and might favor letting parents choose their own enhancements without bureaucratic interference.

Meme Wars: The large Canadian preservationist movement, supported by advocates of bioroid rights and pansapientism, has come to favor Canada's joining the European Union. A national referendum is scheduled for the next election. Business leaders in Montreal mostly look unfavorably on the idea, which would lessen Montreal's role as a middleman city between the European Union, Canada, and the United States, and threaten its ability to remain independent. They hire a group of skilled meme designers and propagators to mobilize support for Canadian independence.

The catch is the strong populist streak in Canadian politics. Overt memetic influence from outside Canada would be unwelcome, and might even provoke a backlash driving Canada further toward the European Union. The memeticists will have to be discrete, either making their campaign appear to originate within Canada, or presenting it as an internal discussion in Montreal whose spread to Canada took place spontaneously. Or, if they can find evidence of *European* meddling in Canada's memetic environment, exposure of that influence could produce a backlash in the other direction.

An Old-Fashioned War: Top level officials in Iran and Pakistan have negotiated a strong alliance of their two nations, at the head of a federation extending into central Asia. But not all of their new allies, or even their own people, are happy with their modernizing policies or their suppression of Muslim traditions that impede modernization.

The federation government has chosen a risky course: proclaiming a jihad of liberation against the culturally Russian government of Sergei Maksimovitch Zarubayev in Kazakstan. The claim to be freeing the nation's Muslim population from totalitarian abuses casts the leaders in a favorable light in Muslim eyes, and the necessities of warfare can be used to justified suppression of criticism. Officially, the invaders are seeking to put an end to Zarubayev's unholy experiments in bioengineering, mind control, and memetics; but there are suspicions that some of them may want to results of his research for themselves. The war could involve Kazakstan's ally Russia, which is a risky policy, but on the other hand a victory over Russian would go a long way toward legitimizing the new alliance as a world power.

Player characters could be soldiers in any of the national armies, or mercenaries hired to lend support. Russia, in particular, might prefer subsidizing Kazakstan's defense to sending its own soldiers into a foreign war. Whatever side the soldiers are on, their position will be morally ambiguous: Kazakstan itself is a harsh dictatorship, Russia is fighting to defend that dictatorship for reasons of global power politics, and the "liberators" are only marginally less authoritarian than the tyrant they seek to overthrow. A campaign focused on the Central Asian War should emphasize the grim realities of modern battle and global power struggles.

Masks: The National University of Benin has announced a conference on Indigenous African Theology and Ritual, devoted to voudoun and kindred faiths around the world. Scholars from all over West Africa and several New World nations, including the United States, are coming together to present papers and workshops.

Naturally, the government of Benin is helping to sponsor the conference, and its support is no secret; among other things, it will bring some much needed foreign exchange credits to a country that desperately needs them. It's not public knowledge, but can be learned without too much trouble, that ministries of cultural affairs in several other nations are sending representatives, for a private parallel conference. Brazil, Cote d'Ivoire, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Togo will all take part. If this is discovered by leaders of Muslim nations or factions, especially West African ones such as Nigeria, they'll almost certainly be opposed, and may try to discredit the event. And further behind the scenes, some of those "cultural affairs under-ministers" actually carry heavier credentials in their respective governments than is commonly known. The real agenda of the parallel conference is to lay the groundwork for a West African Union and mobilize support for it overseas.

Player characters can take part in this conference on several levels. They can be innocent scholars interested in theology, and looking forward to a trip to an exotic African city. They can be journalists trying to find an interesting story in a dull academic event—or suspecting that there's more than scholarship going on and trying to dig out the hidden truth. Or they can be the memetic or security teams hired to cover up the inner truths, while keeping their own presence concealed as well—because the involvement of anyone that good would itself be evidence that something was there to be hidden!

Pyramid Review

Arcane Corridors (Dungeons & Dragons Dungeon Tiles 2)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Designed by Andy Collins, Jesse Decker, David Noonan, & Christopher Perkins

Art by Jason Engle

38 tiles (two 8×10 (tri-part pentagrams & tower sections), two 4×8 (statues & mystic fogs), four 4×4 (mystic eye, runes, flaming portal, pit, & rubble), two 2×8 (lightning path & church pews), 12 2×4 (book cases, flames, bones, heavy doors (intact and broken), mystic beam, & stairs), six 2×2 (runes, spider web, demonic mouth, braziers, & spike pit), eight 1×2 (rubble, doors, magic light (two colors), & altar), two 1×1 (skull pile & murky darkness); full color, mounted; $9.95

When Wizards of the Coast says they're going to do something, they usually do it. (Then again they've strangled a few game lines and supplements in the cradle, too.) In this case it's nice to see they've at least kept up one of their lines long enough to produce the promised next installment in their [Dungeon Tiles](#) line. *Arcane Corridors* offers a mystic bent in its selection.

As before, it's six panels of punch-out tiles, sized perfectly for your Dungeons & Dragons roleplaying game or its sister miniatures line. Those panels spill forth 38 tiles of varying sizes that can be configured several ways to make maps for exploration or perhaps even combat. The wraparound advertising sheath has a few suggested layouts inside, and you can go to the company website for many others.

There are similarities and differences when comparing the second with the first, some for the better, some not. Some observations in no particular order:

The sample maps inside the cover sheet aren't terribly impressive. Perhaps a comparison with the original assortment here is unfair since that was a more generic group of tiles, and using every piece in this set might give you dungeon packed to the gills with magical pentagrams and images, with every room a library or a portal to the Nine Hells. But since they use the same trick here -- putting a plain corridor on one side and a specific image on the other -- to increase utility, there's no reason they couldn't have developed some more intricate designs. Instead we're treated to overly simple arrangements that barely use what's included, as though the graphics team was working with an early prototype (or under a tight deadline). Time to hit that website.

On the gripping hand, there are a few more "double-sideds" here than in the first set, meaning sometimes a corridor isn't an option and you have to choose between bookshelves and the darkness, the pit or a desk. You are buying it for the arcane artifacts, but if you don't have the first set you'll lack some of the corridor/dungeon "connective tissue."

This leads to another mixed blessing -- the art selection. Some of the work is less than thrilling in its subject matter, and some isn't even legible. Is this bit a darkened corridor? A cloud of evil? Is it deliberately left vague? The tiles are a game aid, but most players can color in this kind of "nothing" themselves (and there's more than one plain dark tile). Then again, those featureless tiles are masterworks of ambiguous "Should I be impressed with this graphic?"-ness. Some have what looks like rubble that could also be dibbled bits of spilled paint, while others are just . . . red. A few

illustrations look like they belong to the first set -- spike traps, a skeleton in a pit -- so if the concentration is on the mystic, why include these? Do the creators assume buyers have the original or not?

Then there's the good news. If you think it'll be more plain-Jane corridors on those long pieces, check out the clever use of church pews, lined up and ready for worshippers. The old set gave you a spiral staircase, but this one gives you a whole building with two levels, one on each of the largest panels. Creative use of the medium like this is a bright spot. There are huge webs, gaping, toothy maws, corridors full of flame and lighting, and portals and places of power. Some similar elements did appear in the first product, but here they have a sense of urgency, purpose, and interactivity . . . and if you can convey that just with static art you're doing well.

The tiles are comparable in quality to the first set -- good art, good mounting, solid construction -- and they don't stick together like the first set. Alternately (and like the compression of the punch-out panels, this could be an "oops" that varies from one person's copy to the next), this set has one misprint on a one-by-two (the squares are off). But physically and aesthetically, it's still a first-rate job even if a few tiles lack real impact.

You're still out of luck if you want to take your team too far into the great outdoors (***Arcane Corridors*** does almost nothing to reinforce the paltry outdoor pieces Wizards of the Coast has already released), but that is no doubt the subject of yet another tile set. And if the joy found in compiling a stack of these useful, convenient, and durable tiles is any indication, when such a release presents itself it will be met with righteous enthusiasm.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

The Esoterrorists

Published by [Pelgrane Press](#)

Written by Robin D Laws

Cover & Illustrations by Jérôme Huguenin

88-page b&w softcover; $19.95

The Esoterrorists is the second RPG to be released by British publisher Pelgrane Press, best known for *[The Dying Earth Roleplaying Game](#)* and *[The Book of Unremitting Horror.](#)* Designed by Robin D Laws, the man behind other games such as *[Feng Shui,](#) [Rune,](#)* and *HeroQuest,* the first game powered by the new GUMSHOE system, a modular rules set that sets out to combine a foolproof method of handling investigative games and a means to create such games, with a sound set of General abilities. Significantly it is this same game system that will power the new version of *[Call of Cthulhu,](#)* to be written by Ken Hite.

The Esoterrorists is also designed to be several things. It is meant to be easy to learn, teach, and play, fun to play, as well as innovative, approachable, and sustainable. A GM should be able to learn the game in 30 minutes, its nuances in 60, and be able to teach the game in 15. These make up a design dogma that future releases are also intended to live up to.

Fundamentally though, what the GUMSHOE system (and also *The Esoterrorists*) is designed to do is counter a problem in all investigative RPGs, particularly *Call of Cthulhu.* Which is this: "What happens when a player character fails the roll and thus fails to get the clue?" Does the GM let the game run its course, and if the missed clue is important, have the investigation fail at best, and at worst have the world end? Or does he give the clue out despite the failed roll, thus negating the need for the roll in the first place?

The GUMSHOE system's counter is simple. If a character has the appropriate ability, then he gets the clue; if he wants more than this, then his player spend points to gain special benefits. The point of this is twofold. First, it emphasizes the fact that the characters are competent professionals. Second, it shifts an investigative game's emphasis away from the finding of clues and firmly on to what a character does with a clue and how he interprets it.

Characters under the GUMSHOE system are defined not by the traditional attributes and skills, but by abilities. These are divided into two types, Investigative abilities and General abilities. The first type includes academic disciplines such as Anthropology and Forensic Accounting, interpersonal skills like Bullshit Detector and Reassurance, and technical skills such as Document Analysis and Forensic Anthropology. General abilities represent a mix of physical skills and attributes. Thus they include Health and Stability (the GUMSHOE system's answer to sanity), as well as Athletics, Scuffling (brawling), Shooting, and Surveillance.

Mechanically the GUMSHOE system is kept simple. Each ability also grants a pool of points equal to its value that are spent in game. Those from Investigative abilities are spent to gain the special benefits beyond the desired clue. Those from General abilities are spent to modify dice rolls.

To attempt a simple task, a player rolls a six-sided die, and tries to beat a difficulty number set by the GM. This can be anything between two and eight, but the default is four. To play up the brutality and horror of *The Esoterrorists,* the GM is encouraged not to reveal the difficulty number before a roll. Spending from either type of pool enables a player to buy time in the spotlight for his character. He may still fail for General abilities, but failure is intrinsic to the genre.

Combat continues the brutal, gritty tone. The average person has Health and Stability ratings of four each, so with a handgun doing 1d6 damage, death is a strong possibility. Heavier guns and monsters are deadlier because they add a modifier to the damage roll. If a character's Health pool is reduced to zero or below, consciousness rolls are required, which may require further expenditure of points to make. If a Health pool reaches -12, the character is dead. Stability works on the same scale and can be lost for violent encounters as well as horrifying ones. Recovering Health uses the Medic ability, Stability the Shrink ability, but recovering either takes time. Whilst Investigative pools are refreshed at the end of each case, most General pools are refreshed after a day's rest.

Character generation is a matter of deciding upon a role in the game and assigning 60 points to General abilities, and a variable number to Investigative abilities. The more players there are, the fewer the number of points for Investigative abilities.

Unsurprisingly, the GUMSHOE system really only supports the one type of scenario. To that end, the advice for the GM is devoted to writing the investigative game. The method suggested being to start with what the villain wants and work backwards, fitting clues to the characters' Investigative abilities. It is also suggested that the game be run in an episodic fashion like a television series. The most radical step towards this is having the GM hold up a card with "SCENE" written on it to stop the players wasting time.

If that is the GUMSHOE system, what is *The Esoterrorists?* It is a contemporary post-Cold-War setting in which the major threat comes not from mundane forces, but from a conspiracy of occult terrorists working to weaken the fabric of reality and let the monsters in. Although magic is hard, it can be strengthened by making it part of the global consensus. Operating against the Esoterrorists is the "Ordo Veritatis," reality's last defender. This secret organization is part-paranormal investigation agency, part-paranormal clean-up department, and is sanctioned by virtually every government world wide.

The Esoterrorists setting is lightly sketched, but it is designed to fit a contemporary world. This sketchy nature means that the GM has room to create his own game, and to keep it more contemporary, it is suggested that the GM draw from news stories. It is supported by "Operation Slaughterhouse," a more detailed scenario than would introduce other RPGs.

Physically *The Esoterrorists* is a well-presented easy read. The artwork tends towards the gritty and the cartoon style, though it is gruesome in places. If the game has any weakness it is in the lack of monsters, and in the slight nature of the background. The lack of monsters is more of a problem, but inspiration can easily be found elsewhere, from *Fortean Times* to other roleplaying supplements. The background though is more of a framework for the GM to fill in.

For the most part, *The Esoterrorists* and the GUMSHOE system lives up to its intended goals. It only innovates in rejecting the dogma of having to roll to find clues, but this only makes play easier. During a convention game I picked up the rules in five minutes along with the basic background and what we were meant to be doing. I suspect that it will be as easy with my own gaming group. The setting feels like the reverse of *The X-Files* or *Delta Green,* possessing a pop-culture sensibility.

The Esoterrorists is a light game through and through, from mechanics to setting. This enables it to achieve its aims -- easy to learn, play, teach, and so on, with scenario design being more focused than easier. It will be interesting to see what the GUMSHOE system will power, but *The Esoterrorists* adroitly counters a problem to let you get on with the game.

--Matthew Pook

A Jerk for 114 Minutes

This week's installment was going to be about the evolving history of holidays, but I think I might have written that column 1d6 Christmases ago, and even if I didn't I'm sure it's an obvious enough idea that I'll remember it again next year.

However, this week has found me at the In-Laws home, a magical wonderland of unlimited snacks and cable television. The latter is the subject of this week's verbiage. In particular, my mother-in-law (the wonderful and inimitable Maryelna, about whom I can say nothing bad, and not just because it'd be a bummer to spend the holiday outside shivering in the slush) is a big fan of the various made-for-television holiday movies, which all have utterly indistinguishable titles such as *Lifetime Presents Hallmark Cinema's Christmas Miracle Angel Tale to Remember From the Heart.* So they've been running near-nonstop in the household for the past week save for some *CSI* reruns and a random episode of the new *Doctor Who* (a better random hour of watching I've not had this year).

Anyway, two nights ago I saw the first half of a particularly challenging installment of such a movie: [Christmas at Water's Edge.](#) Starring Keshia Knight Pulliam (formerly of *The Cosby Show*), the movie provided a truly painful experience to watch. This is not merely because of the finite-monkeys writing or the more-wooden-than-Kevin-Costner-in-a-forest performances by the entire cast (including Tom "the guy who played a father on both *Happy Days* and *Father Dowling Mysteries*" Bosley, an actor I generally enjoy). Rather, it's because of a trend of a great number of holiday movies: the need for redemption. Curiously, it's a problem related to most *Cinderella* iterations as well.

Now, normally I'm a huge fan of redemption. Indeed, from a gaming standpoint, the need for redemption (of various forms) is one of the strongest and most visceral themes you can have for a character concept. In the world of PCs, the need to be redeemed from some sin -- untrustingness, a violent temper, cowardice -- makes a great long-term goal from which you can hang many subplots (and, from a mechanical standpoint, a source in many games for extra points at character creation). And from an NPC standpoint, many players go ga-ga over the notion of a bad guy who can be redeemed (c.f. "Vader, Darth").

Unfortunately, in your standard movie or television episode permutation of the redemption cycle, the audience is subjected to 95% horridness followed by 5% redemption. In other words, in a two-hour movie you're forced to endure 114 minutes of the main character being an awful human being followed by six minutes of "Golly gee, I've finally learned the real meaning of Christmas!" (Same problem with Cinderella.rand() -- in almost all cases, the audience has to accept the morsel of a few minutes of comeuppance for the stepmother/stepsisters in return for enduring the preceding hours of Cinderella being treated like a second-hand *Planet of the Apes* piñata by her family.)

And this was the crime of *Christmas at Water's Edge.* The Keshia Knight Pullman character played a horribly spoiled student who was able to elevate the flatter-than-flat material of the script to unfathomable heights of horridness, vibrating each sentence's syllabic superstrings to new levels of nail-grating selfishness matched only by the unimaginably deep levels of shallowness. It mattered not what level of redemption her character reached at the end; the only just reward for the suffering audience involved the front end of a fast-moving bus. (Whether this bus is best suited for the Pullman character or the audience is left to the imagination.)

From a gaming standpoint, this is merely an expression of the previously detailed notions that [quirky doesn't need to equal annoying](#). Just because a character is in need of redemption doesn't mean that the character needs to be an insufferable twit until that point. Probably the quintessential example in cinema is George Bailey, played by James Stewart in the classic *It's a Wonderful Life.* In this case, because of the movie's storytelling techniques, we aren't subjected to the 95%-horrid-to-5%-redeemed ratio. No, the bulk of the movie depicts Bailey as a sympathetic, warm, and likable character, even though he possessed the traits for which he needed to be redeemed (namely, the desire to escape from Bedford Falls). It's only for about 30 minutes of the movie (at most) that we're exposed to the Needs-Redeeming-Bailey, and through most of that, he's being quiet and enduring a parallel timeline owing to a worldjumping "angel."

Or, as another holiday example, consider the novel's depiction -- as well as most cinematic portrayals -- of Ebenezer

Scrooge from *A Christmas Carol.* While on the surface this seems to be an example of the 95%/5% rule, in actuality the breakdown of the story is such that we -- as an audience -- witness a number of scenes in which Scrooge is happy or doesn't necessarily require redemption (in this case, told via flashback through the Ghost of Christmas Past). And Scrooge makes a number of steps toward redemption along the way; he struggles with the issue, avoiding the last-five-minute epiphany by so doing. (In fact, in many movie portrayals, one gets the impression that the Ghost of Christmas Future is almost unnecessary, with the visitations of the first three ghosts[1] proving almost effective enough.)

Continuing on this theme with another holiday movie (albeit not the holiday that quickly looms), check out Phil Connors (played by Bill Murry) from 1993's *Groundhog Day.* Again, this is a character that could have been utterly horrible to observe on screen, but was only truly obnoxious for about 20 minutes or so; he starts learning lessons early on, and keeps learning them until the end when he's fully redeemed.

For gamers, probably the biggest lesson to take away from these examples is the notion that redemption is not a switch; it's a road. It's not usually something where someone gets whacked with a brick and then vows never to do ill again. No, it's a process by which it's possible for characters to take baby-steps toward the light. For games with point-level disadvantages, this process might even be representable by slowly paying off those (going from, say, a 15-point "Paranoid" to a 10-point "Untrusting" to a 5-point "Skeptical"). By having multiple steps, it allows a character to develop in a more natural way, *and* has the possibility of allowing a player to play variations on the character's theme. ("Okay; first I was a bloodthirsty psychopath out for vengeance at all costs. Now I'm a bloodthirsty schemer who exacts his sense of vengeance on others. Perhaps next month I'll finally evolve into a professional assassin who's prone to moments of rashness.") And, of course, it helps not to make the matter of redemption so egregious that the other characters (and players) are counting the moments until you stop acting that way.

Another great thing about a road (from a storytelling standpoint) is that it's possible to go backwards . . . to regress. Maybe our "Untrusting" character has had a few rough months where a half-dozen supposed allies have betrayed the heroes, and he slides on back to "Paranoid."

In much the same way that redemption is often a fuller experience when prolonged, so, too, is the comeuppance experienced when things fall apart for a wicked-doer. Assuming the heroes don't force the ne'er-do-well to meet his end at the extremities of a pointy object -- by no means a foregone conclusion -- the lengthy downfall of a villain can prove to be truly satisfying to the players, especially if that evildoer proved to be a thorn in the side of the heroes for a considerable length of time; a good example from the world of comics is the Kingpin from the *Daredevil* series. (And, again, a prolonged fall allows for a comeback . . . just like the Kingpin did . . .)

Regardless, just because you're crafting a redemption story doesn't mean that the character needs to be an insufferable jerk until his epiph gets kneed. And if you're looking to get a last minute gift for your players, try to make sure the punishment the villains receive is proportional to the length of misery they caused the heroes.

And if you start watching any holiday movies where, after the first hour, you want every character to die, consider just turning it off. Try the eggnog . . . it's special.

--Steven Marsh

[1] Four other ghosts in one cinematic version of the story, the identity of which I leave as a trivia question for the reader.

Designer's Notes for [Transhuman Space: Changing Times](#)

or,
Making Changes

by Phil Masters

"The utter antithesis between the modern world and the old is determined by all those things that formerly did not exist. Our lives have been enriched by elements the possibility of whose existence the ancients did not even suspect. Men have identified material contingencies, and revealed spiritual attitudes, whose repercussions are felt in a thousand ways."
-- *Manifesto of Futurist Architecture*, Antonio Sant'Elia (1914)

It would normally be unbecomingly immodest to describe one's own work as "keenly anticipated," but in the case of *Changing Times*, I have hard evidence; this PDF publication was selling well, with downloads in three figures, before its publication had even been formally announced. Of course, one might expect *Transhuman Space* fans to be forward-looking and Internet-aware . . . And I should also admit that this publication had been pre-announced and then unavoidably delayed in a rather teasing way. But these reactions were still flattering.

Not that I can claim more than fragmentary credit here. *Changing Times* is a guide and update for the *Transhuman Space* universe, which isn't my creation; all of us who've worked on the line must acknowledge the vast inspiration provided by David Pulver, whose setting this is. I was mostly adding footnotes. For that matter, as part of *Changing Times* is a set of rules-related updates to *GURPS* Fourth Edition, I inevitably drew on the manuscript versions of the new editions of *GURPS Bio-Tech* and *Ultra-Tech,* which were still under development at the time. It's not that technology in the *Transhuman Space* setting exactly matches the assumptions in those books in every particular -- when you're making guesses about the future, some variation is part of the fun -- but there were also points of close contact, and I tried to use the same game mechanics where possible.

(Though I should say that *Changing Times* readers are very, very strongly recommended to acquire those two books, if and when possible -- along with *GURPS Powers,* for that matter. All three provide countless ideas which can be imported in their entirety or with minor adjustments. For example, one thing I almost borrowed from *Powers* was the "Burst" enhancement for Telecommunication, which I think should fit a lot of military telecommunication devices and implants that'll show up in *Transhuman Space*.)

Guidance Systems

"The rapid progress true *Science now makes, occasions my regretting sometimes that I was born too soon . . . Agriculture may diminish its labor and double its produce: all diseases may by sure means be prevented or cured, not excepting even that of old age, and our lives lengthened at pleasure . . . Oh that moral science were in as fair a way of improvement, that men would cease to be wolves to one another, and that human beings would at length learn what they now improperly call humanity."*
-- Benjamin Franklin to Joseph Priestly (1780)

But anyway . . . These footnotes to David's masterwork did seem to be *wanted,* and I don't just mean the new rules

stuff. The first half of **Changing Times** consists of a GM's guide, and the fact is, those of us involved with the line have kept hearing gamers say that they're impressed with **Transhuman Space,** but they feel lost and overwhelmed by the huge, detailed world of 2100, and can't see hooks for adventurous plots. Actually, there are plenty of such hooks, but they may need a little more finding than those seen in straightforward kill-the-monsters games.

After all, in 2100, the question of what or who is a "monster" is wide open for debate -- and that debate can easily form part of a campaign. So I sat down and went over the setting looking for options, from the depths of Earth's oceans to the Kuiper Belt, and from deadly espionage games to weird sitcoms. A lot of this is categorization and cataloguing, but that's always a good first step. I hope that I'll get people not only playing more **Transhuman Space** games, but a greater diversity of such games.

The Continuing Career of Tanith Tokamura Hecate

"In the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed."
--Charles Darwin

One concept which I openly borrowed from David is that of Mutable Point Totals, which *Pyramid* readers will recognise as having first appeared in his own [Designer's Notes Article](#) for the line's original core book, but which I felt deserved restatement and re-emphasis. It's actually an interesting option and approach for any campaign in any setting, but it has special resonance and usefulness in the wide-open worlds of **Transhuman Space;** it tells nervous GMs that, rather than worrying about the wilder possibilities of the setting, they should emphasize and embrace them.

Among other things, I preserved the original illustrative story -- the adventuring career of Tanith Tokamura Hecate. I tweaked the text a very little to reflect the numerical facts of *Fourth Edition,* but then, unfortunate editorial necessity meant that Tanith's recalculated history in the published text was truncated, ending with the loss of her hand and her becoming a 153-point character. Of course, loss of a hand is hardly a permanent problem in this setting, and David's original account had one more big twist, so in fact, the new text can continue:

In Tanith's fourth adventure, she's on Luna, hanging around the Moonshadow spa waiting for her new hand to grow, while Grimalkin prowls the bars. However, the GM decides to make things interesting. In the spa, Tanith runs into a tall, dark, and handsome stranger who turns out to be an Amortality Assassin. Tanith discovers and foils the assassin's plot (one-handed!), and the GM awards her 2 character points. He also tells her that a local reporter, who got a good story out of this incident, qualifies as a 3-point Contact. She also gets her hand replaced, eliminating the One Hand disadvantage. This interlude has thus seen a net gain of 20 points; she's now a 173- point character.

In the party's fifth adventure, Tanith and Grimalkin go to L5 to salvage a nuclear reactor from an abandoned plague-struck space habitat. Unfortunately, it's not abandoned: they discover a nest of Maple Syndicate data pirates. In the ensuing firefight, Tanith is shot dead. Grimalkin rushes Tanith's corpse to hospital and arranges for it to be brainpeeled. The operation succeeds, and Tanith is now a ghost.

Grimalkin can't afford a new body for Tanith, but she remembers the cyberdoll they captured, and has it repaired. Tanith wakes up in that. It's worth 127 points -- 40 more than her old Tennin body (which was worth 27 for the template plus 60 for +2 ST and +4 HT), while being a ghost is worth 86! She earned 1 character point during the adventure, while Grimalkin had to take out a loan to cover the cost of all that work, which leaves her with a Debt [-2], so she's now a 298-point character. But she's no longer human . . .

Template Tweaks

Did I request thee, Maker, from my Clay
To mould me Man, did I sollicite thee
From darkness to promote me, or here place
In this delicious Garden?

-- Paradise Lost, John Milton

But along with the GM's guide chapters, there is indeed the *Fourth Edition* update material, tying the wondrous technologies and concepts of the world of 2100 to the new rule mechanics. This, as it turned out, couldn't be "complete," in the sense that we didn't, for example, have room for all the templates from all the supplements (some of which are a bit specialized, if truth is told). I squeezed in everything from the original core book, plus some useful bits and pieces from elsewhere or from out of my own head; hopefully, that'll provide plentiful guidelines to any GM who wants to use anything out of the other books before anyone gets around to producing an appropriate official conversion. But by way of further illustration, let's look at a couple of templates from Jon Zeigler's excellent ***[Fifth Wave.](#)***

Transhuman Space has various categories of "racial" template to consider; parahumans/bioroids, uplifted animals, infomorphs, cybershells, and so on. The *Fourth Edition* version of ***Bio-Tech*** tackles a lot of relevant organics, providing direct conversions of some (though not all) ***Fifth Wave*** content, so we'll focus elsewhere.

Infomorphs

"There are three classes of intellects: one which comprehends by itself; another which appreciates what others comprehend; and a third which neither comprehends by itself nor by the showing of others."
-- The Prince, Niccolo Machiavelli

Infomorphs are generally the most limited of these categories in terms of options, and ***Changing Times*** actually covers almost all of this subject. However, ***Fifth Wave*** does have one more type: the Free Meme.

This pretty closely resembles the standard NAI-4, so we can use the new templates for that as a basis for the free meme template, making changes to parallel the differences in the *Third Edition* versions; see the notes on the NAI templates in ***Changing Times*** for more details. (Incidentally, many free memes may have Clueless *as well as* No Sense of Humor.) However, there are three problems or points of variance worth mentioning.

1. As a bit of detail color, this version of the template is permitted to take Obsession or Extreme Fanaticism in place of standard Fanaticism, if desired; the exact form taken by a free meme's motivations can surely vary quite a bit.

2. The original template has the Parasite disadvantage, to represent its dependence on an existing AI system; unlike "regular" AIs, free memes can't function as standalone computer operating systems. However, Parasite no longer exists in *Fourth Edition* games. To represent this requirement, the template is given a Dependency. Having an AI or similar to manage the cybershell on which the free meme is running can be treated as "Very Common" (AI-run systems are that pervasive in 2100), and the free meme is clearly Constantly dependent. If the managing AI shuts down, the GM can simply apply the standard effects for such a missed Dependency -- 1 HP lost per minute, representing progressive system failures in the cybershell or something; alternatively, one can rule that, just as a machine which misses its fuel requirements just stops going until refuelled rather than suffering progressive damage, a cybershell without a governing AI simply shuts down until something appropriate is reinstalled and rebooted.

3. The original template also included Computer Hacking as a racial skill; however, that's now classed as cinematic, and won't be permitted in a lot of "realistic" ***Transhuman Space*** campaigns. Free memes *have* to be able to subvert and infiltrate computer systems, but can do this in a wide variety of ways. Hence, unusually for a "racial" template, this one is given a choice of skills on which to spend some of its points. At the GM's option, these points might also be assigned to appropriate Contacts, Perks to represents knowledge of crucial access codes or "back doors" into various system, and so on.

Free Meme   *36 points*

Attribute Modifiers: IQ-2 [-40].

Advantages: AI (without Reprogrammable) [42]; Enhanced Time Sense [45]; Indomitable [15]; Possession (Digital, -40%) [60]; Single-Minded [5]; Unaging (IQ only, -75%) [4]; Unfazeable [15].

Disadvantages: Automaton (without Slave Mentality) [-45]; Dead Broke [-25]; Dependency (Presence of another, controlling AI on the same system; Very Common, Constantly) [-25]; Extreme Fanaticism, Fanaticism, or Obsession (long-term) (9) [-15]; Social Stigma (Subjugated) [-20].

Racial Skills: Computer Operation/TL10 (E) IQ+3 [8]-11, and 12 points in any of Computer Operation/TL9, Computer Programming, Electronics Operation (Communications or Media), Fast-Talk, or improvements to Computer Operation/TL10 -- or Computer Hacking in cinematic games.

Features: Complexity 4 program; Taboo Traits (Self-Awareness).

Note: Some free memes may be Reprogrammable, having been designed to be brought back under control by their original creators if necessary, or being closely based on a standard NAI design -- but most people who choose to create free memes deliberately make them as hard to control as possible. Unlike properly designed AIs, free memes not only *can* have a wide range of mental disadvantages, but often *do* -- but they also occasionally have interesting advantages, such as the Full Memory Access enhancement on their Possession advantage. Some also "buy off" the Incurious disadvantage (included in Automaton); indeed, their interest in the world in general can be intense, if quirkish or erratic.

A free meme's "Subjugated" Social Stigma is something of a variant case. On the one hand, nobody (except possibly its original creator) regards it as a servant or a slave, and it has rather more freedom of action than most subjugated entities; on the other hand, almost everyone regards it as a minor nuisance at best, a deadly menace at worst, and will probably delete it without a second thought; it can very easily find itself marked down for elimination.

Cybershells

Machines take me by surprise with great frequency.
-- Alan Turing (1950)

While there are relatively few really distinct infomorph categories, there is a huge assortment of cybershell types on which infomorphs can run. *Fifth Wave*'s "wingbot" is a handy option for adventuring types, albeit mostly as a tool or remote-operated drone -- its computer is just about big enough to run some fully-sapient software, given use of expensive high-end options, but it's a bit flimsy and short of features for most PCs to want it as a primary shell. Most of the template's features convert straightforwardly, but it's worth going over a few of the details.

1. The *Third Edition* version has ST 4, which converts to ST 6 in *Fourth Edition.* The original also has 2 HP, which sounds a bit weak for a 45 lb., ST 6 machine, even one which is described as "physically delicate" and which is built for high-agility flight -- even the buzzbot, a flying cybershell which weighs just 5 lbs., is given 3 HP in both editions. So we'll allow ourselves a bit of flexibility in the conversion and grant the new treatment HP just one less than its ST. Other attributes convert straight over (and this thing's DX is highly respectable -- it's evidently *very* agile).

2. While most armed cybershells simply take Weapon Mount or Payload rather than Innate Attack or whatever, the wingbot's electroshock device really does look like a valid exception; it's completely integral to the machine. This is of course an Affliction, identical to the shock glove as discussed in *Changing Times*. Its drug injector, on the other hand, is the equivalent of a cheap hand- held device, and needs to be charged with whatever drug is to be injected, so it can be treated as a simple Accessory Perk. (Admittedly it can be used in combat, which isn't normal for an Accessory, but we'll stretch a point here -- we're already adding significantly to the template cost for that electroshock thing, after all.)

3. The wingbot is described in the text as using "batteries," but has Filter Lungs rather than Doesn't Breathe. The most plausible interpretation of this is that it uses some kind of fuel cell system, requiring oxygen from the atmosphere but generating electricity to power its various systems. The details of the template can be set accordingly.

4. It's also described as having just two hours' endurance when in flight, but can stretch that to 30 hours if it stays on the ground -- and it's far from useless in the latter case. It'd be nice to represent that feature, though it's a little fiddly. The best approach seems to be to give it Reduced Consumption 2 (which strictly speaking only gives 24 hours of operation; it's up to the GM whether to enforce this strictly or stretch it to 30 hours, but a higher level of Reduced Consumption would take the period out to a full week) -- and then give its Flight and Enhanced Move (Air) a Temporary Disadvantage limitation, with the "disadvantage" consisting of replacing Reduced Consumption with Increased Consumption 2, a net -24 point modification and hence a -24% limitation.

So, finally, here's the *Fourth Edition* wingbot template. It's expensive, but you get versatility, speed, impressive agility, a powerful visual sensor array, and built-in weapons:

Wingbot   *240 points*

Attribute Modifiers: ST-4 [-40]; DX+4 [80]; HT+2 [20].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP -1 [-2]; SM -2.

Advantages: Absolute Direction (Requires Signal, -20%) [4]; Acute Vision 3 [6]; Affliction 3 (Stunning; Armor Divisor (2), +50%; Melee Attack, Reach C, -30%) [36]; Damage Resistance 3 (Can't Wear Armor, -40%) [9]; Enhanced Move 2 (Air) (Temporary Disadvantage, replace Reduced Consumption 2 with Increased Consumption 2, -24%) [31]; Enhanced Move 1 (Ground) [20]; Filter Lungs [5]; Flight (Cannot Hover, -15%; Small Wings, -10%; Temporary Disadvantage, replace Reduced Consumption 2 with Increased Consumption 2, -24%) [21]; Machine [25]; Night Vision 9 [9]; Payload 5 [5]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Reduced Consumption 2 [4]; Telecommunication (Cable Jack; Video, +40%) [7]; Telecommunication (Laser Communication) [15]; Telecommunication (Radio; Video, +40%) [14]; Telescopic Vision 4 [20]; Temperature Tolerance 3 [3].

Disadvantages: Cybershell Body [-15]; Maintenance (Electronics Repair and Mechanic skills, 2 people, Monthly) [-4]; Mute [-25]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Restricted Diet (Common, hydrogen or refined hydrocarbon fuel) [-20].

Perks: Accessory (Drug Injector); Accessory (Small Computer) [2].

Features: Individuals of the same model closely resemble each other.

Tomos, the Divided Land

Fantasy Planehopping for *GURPS*

by William J. Keith

Shadows twisted along unseen dimensions, and the sorceress stepped out of a pool of darkness. Her green eyes flashed with anger. "Utrecht you old bookworm, aren't you ready yet? I walk across three worlds to take you to dinner for your birthday and here I find you still hunched over that oddity we picked up."

"Patience, Vail," said the balding sage studying his crystal ball. "Anyway, you say that as if it was more than 10 minutes from your place to mine. . . here we are." Vail watched the crystal pick up an aura from the rune-incised blade of strange blue metal. Images of its history formed in the crystal. The blade pierced flesh, withdrew; the holder shuddered from some blow and dropped it. Utrecht paused the vision and skillfully turned the viewpoint.

Fleeing comrades. A tall female archer looking distraught. A mage tracing out a banishing. And the enemy the weapon had bitten -- Vail gasped. "Void Below. . . it's him. Or a double of him." But no, that one didn't have doubles. He'd eaten them. "We have to alert the Academy, get the containment spell worked up."

Utrecht nodded. "I'll do that. You and Ks'sik need to coordinate with the folk of the latest planet he's invaded. Take the blade and use it to track down a gate to their world. Every enemy of that one is a friend of ours."

He glanced at the blade and winced. "Though you may want to warn them that metal doesn't work on him."

* * *

You want to play in a fantastic setting, one where mysterious sages and canny loremasters match wits against horrors too impossible for physics. You want your campaign to span the infinite worlds, letting bold explorers stride across the endless realities, seeking fortune or kicks. There's just one problem, if you're using *GURPS* mechanics: magic is far more limited in its flexibility than a conveyor when it comes to jumping worlds. Any Plane Shift spell or item is limited to a single destination plane; dimensional highways have fixed exit ramps.

Not that a canny loremaster would let that stop him.

The Divided Land

The Divided Land first manifests to travelers as a series of unlit caverns with uncertain gravity and twisted dimensionality. From here, a traveler can access a number of planes -- which some mages argue are other worlds, others describing them as states of existence -- that strongly reflect pure forms of traditional magical characteristics, such as elemental Water, powerful meteorological processes, or icy dark voids. The collection of such worlds has been named the Elemental Complex by Tomosic mages. The Complex contains numerous gates that lead to more normal worlds, where humans (or other, as the case may be) live their own lives on solid ground under sunlit sky. Some of these worlds even feature near-twins of people from back home, living lives eerily similar to the originals.

The Complex can be accessed in multiple ways: by Plane Shift, by the Jumper advantage, and by natural gate. This latter is the most important method, for the Divided Land seems to hold at least one natural gate to every mana-positive world *somewhere* on that world.

For planar travel, first enter the Divided Land via any preferred means; mages can plane shift, but if a world has enchanted a known, permanent gate, any muledriver with a wagon can waltz in. Next, locate your destination: if that muledriver has a load of Gabrook sparkseeds heading for a trade center on Olokun he can follow a paved road, but if

you want to find the gate to the world that made this sword you're holding, magic is required. The spells Seek Gate and Pathfinder are the most common method, but various methods of divination can occasionally give good results. Finally, you have to get to the gate you've found -- either teleport, or walk. The Divided Land has a famously flexible notion of "distance" and, for that matter, "space," so paths from one gate to another can take a turn around a stone pillar and end up in a new cavern that reads as hundreds of miles away. Any number of gates can crowd within a few days' hiking distance of a single gate for travelers who know the right turns.

Quirks of the Divided Land

Sometimes the shortest path between two gates runs across a cave-in or takes a side trip through a world of raging fires, so pathblazing explorers in the Complex tend to have either short or well-paid lives. The difference is usually in how well they're prepared. The very first step is to know the basic lay of the ground:

The region of the Divided Land in which most interplanar travel takes place manifests as a series of dry, chilly (39° on average) caverns lacking natural light sources. Air is fed through the gates, and can be still and stale when travelers are a long way between sources of fresh air. Gravity in these caverns is very low, as little as one-tenth g, and vanishes in some places -- when earth and stone surround you in all directions, local gravity is mostly a function of nearby concentrations of mass. The material of the plane is primarily dry stone, with strata of various kinds of stone appearing in orders unconstrained by geological necessity. The caverns appear to have been carved not by water but usually by lava or rockfall, and the ground can be treacherous and broken, making for slow going.

Adventurers that must travel to a previously uncharted gate must take everything needed for survival: food, water, light, and means of warmth. Wise precautions include means of moving or passing through large quantities of stone, as cave-ins do occasionally block or change routes. For that matter, cavern-combed portions of the plane, while the easiest ways to travel, do not make up the bulk of the plane -- if a traveler can reliably pass *through* stone, or simply teleport his party directly to a scryed destination, travel is significantly eased. Between much-traveled gates within its sphere of influence, Tomos has sponsored the creation of a network of roads, with stops for rest and supply, and even teleport gates for worlds whose gates are inconveniently far apart for business travel. (Tomos is a "home timeline" suitable for crossplanar fantasy adventuring. For a thumbnail sketch of Tomosic culture, see the material below.)

The Elemental Complex is mostly normal-mana, though near gates to low- or high-mana worlds some leakage can occur. If a GM features aspected mana in his setting, the caverns most travellers see are high-mana with respect to Earth spells, meaning that even non-mages can find it useful to know simple survival spells such as Earth to Air, Seek Pass, Predict Earth Movement, and Walk Through Earth. Other parts of the Complex feature other elemental primacies that have differently-aspected mana and require different safeguards, and particular sites in the Complex feature materials or powers of industrial or military interest that have undergone settlement and development. For a few of these sites, see later in the article.

Tomos: The Homeland

The culture that is generally regarded in the Divided Land as having first explored the Complex and proposed multiworld alliance is Tomos. Many planehopping mages still hail from that land and its confederated nations.

Tomos is a single large island-state on a world called Amalle, with geography significantly different from Homeline. As Amalle is orbited by an additional moon, the likely explanation is multiple meteorite impacts in prehistory. The world lacks large continents; most of the land, which covers 20 to 25 percent of the planet's surface, comes in hundreds of islands ranging between Puerto Rico and Cuba in size, with thousands more uncharted specks dotting the seas. The restrictions of island ecosystems mean

The Ways of the World(s)

The trappings of The Divided Land are not the only way to run this sort of game, of course. The core assumption a GM needs to make in order to facilitate crossworld fantasy gaming in this style is that there exists a single world or timeline -- that is, a "plane," as defined by the Plane Shift spell -- which has gates to indefinitely many and potentially all mana-positive worlds reasonably accessible. It is a bonus, allowing for multiworld interaction, if this plane has some obvious feature which makes it a natural consequence of magical theory, so that it can be independently accessed

that Amalle boasts a biologist's dream of biodiversity, each island bearing a unique niche in climates ranging from tropical to arctic. Only large deserts and plains lack representation.

Tomos sits on an island divided by a mountain ridge (hence the name, the Divided Land, which was carried over to the Complex). The nation has a TL3 culture that Homeline would find vaguely Greek, if the Greek Golden Age had never been interrupted by Rome and continued to progress toward Renaissance technology without an intervening Dark Ages. It elects a national legislature called the Convention and a head of state called the Executor; the island's precincts and each outlying island that has sworn loyalty to the Tomosic Confederation elect smaller versions. The vote is restricted to literate citizens of Status 1 or higher. This status is achievable by paying a significant one-time fee, passing a literacy test, and taking an oath of loyalty with other citizens as character witnesses. Religion constitutes veneration of four Gods, one of each primary element: Amalkur of Earth, Lyn of Water, Whess of Air, and Zikti of Fire, each with an opposing Devil. Tomos practices debt- and prison-slavery, always for finite terms, and slavery is not inherited. Tomosics are fairly broad-minded about foreigners and foreign cultures, though women suffer one level of Social Stigma. (They *can* vote, if they qualify, but none has yet been elected to office.)

The presence of magic has retarded some areas of practical applications, such as agriculture and medicine. On the other hand, mathematics has been leaping ahead and the tentative beginnings of TL4 calculus are being explored to support magic, astrology, and the well-respected arts. The written word is equally honored, with many poets and orators employed in the nation. The study of magic in the Tomosic style means Tomosic mages must be literate and have at least 1 point spent in Mathematics/TL4; the tradition is academic, and "hedge wizards" are fairly rare. Peasant girls who show Magery are usually quietly taught a few rustic versions of healing and plant spells (not requiring math or literacy), while rich girls can get a complete education.

Mages are rare enough that they are not expended as artillery in military maneuvers. Tomos depends less on military magic than on national secrets to protect its preeminence among its world's cultures. It is the sole holder on Amalle of the knowledge of the techniques necessary to properly smith orichalcum, and employs military force to guard deposits found in the Complex. For centuries it protected the secrets of making gates, but that knowledge has been disseminated to foreign cultures of Amalle via mages from other worlds. The advantage lasted long enough, however, to establish Tomos as the point of contact for travelers to Amalle, and it intends to continue building on that head start. At present, knowing Smith/TL3 (Orichalcum) requires Security Clearance (Tomos) for someone from Amalle, and either Security Clearance or Unusual Background (taught by offworlder) [5] for someone from this planet to know any of the spells Seek, Scry, Control, or Create Gate. Tomosic mages who learn Gate spells are often inducted into the Order of the Tetrahedron and make a living travelling the Complex and the Atlas.

Conquest is difficult on a world consisting of a series of islands, so military aggression between island groups is rare. Instead, Tomos and the other major cultures on Amalle struggle to gain the loyalties of expanding spheres of influence

from many worlds.

The Divided Land was created to be compatible with material in *GURPS Cabal,* in which the material world holds an entrance to the Plane of Earth beneath the island of Crete on that timeline. It further describes the planes of the elemental decans as meeting within Hod, upon the Astral, and the *GURPS Fourth Edition* sourcebook *Infinite Worlds* describes the Astral as touching all worlds. The only serious addendum needed to complete the setup is the notion that each mana-positive alternate Earth has such a gate below Crete, or more generally, that each mana-positive alternate timeline has some such gate. This done, the GM has merely to decree that travel time on the Astral portion of the trip is within reason to make magical crossplanar travel feasible.

What is "really" going on, as the Cabal would describe the Complex, is that Tomosic mages are physically entering Yetzirah, usually along the decan of Ieropaêl, via a natural area of strong tangency featured on all or most mana-positive worlds. They walk through a restricted portion of Yetzirah that does not bend well to the usual methods of manipulating ectoplasm, heading to that point the sphere of Mercury where the four elemental planes meet. They use their knowledge to draw on the raw energies of Iudal in that place, moving across the boundaries between worlds. The "Gods" they worship are the four Archangels, who may or may not know about the theurgic veneration coming their way; Tomosics certainly do not have much conception of Briah or Atziluth.

in a protracted contest that their philosophers have come to call the "polonis psûkhes," the clash of minds. This struggle has broken into armed conquest in the past, most notably in the Enlightenment War, but today Tomosic garrisons exist mainly for defense and the soldiers of the clash of minds are orators and merchants who spread Tomosic ideals of democracy and progress.

A clash of minds requires opponents. The Varen Union, a theocratic regime bound together by its monotheist Church of Oneness, sends forth missionary priests from the cold north to inspire the fervent loyalty of foreign islands, and the writ of the Church's leader, Great-Grandfather, holds sway in the second-largest sphere of influence on the planet after the Executor of Tomos. They call the holy mission "da selekirg," the war of souls. The Sanguine Alliance reached peaceable terms of equality with Tomos during the Enlightenment War after Tomosics were impressed by the technological know-how of the Sanguine's air defenses (silk, in the form of balloons and hang-gliders, serves the Sanguine as well as orichalcum serves the Executor), and has maintained the bulk of its territory. To the east of Tomos, the Azarin League, a TL0-1 region bound together mostly by a desire not to become subservient to foreign powers, has steadily seen its compact erode as islands along its edges switch loyalties. And the Wild Islands yet rebuff all attempts at settlement.

Other Worlds

Tomos has good relations with a number of worlds inhabited by other intelligent beings that are less elemental and more familiar. Trade and diplomacy take place between these worlds, whose physical collection and structure of relationships are collectively called the Atlas by Tomosics. Loren'dil, Gabrook, and Olokun are three fantasy worlds Infinity has yet to contact. These worlds fed fantastic creatures to Yrth via the Banestorm, which has not continued to draw residents from them. Thus, they make excellent candidates for worlds to align with Tomos to form the oldest core of the Atlas. Tomos would have contacted these worlds some time after the Banestorm hit and would extend the hand of the Enlightenment along with trade and diplomatic relations.

Gabrook is the desert home of kobolds and reptile men; Olokun is a watery world home to merfolk; Loren'dil is a temperate planet of halflings, centaurs, and giants. Merfolk would be right at home in the seas of Tomos' archipelago homeworld, and their habitat would render them essentially immune to the more aggressive moves in the Enlightenment War; centaurs being creatures of Greek mythology, they may have independently produced democratic forms and thus qualified as immediate equals in Tomosic eyes, while relations with Gabrook would be strained, occasionally breaking out into transplanar warfare with the reptile men. Little detail is set for these worlds, so the GM has a free hand in building their geography and cultures. For the few paragraphs of basics that *have* been set down about these worlds and templates for many of their inhabitants, see GURPS Banestorm.

The GM may set the number of reliably charted gates to alternate normal-worlds wherever he pleases; having a hundred or more would make crossworld travel a typical part of life on Tomos and leave plenty of room for his own worlds, and as always an infinite expanse beyond for new exploration, new threats, and new rewards.

Offworld Sites of Interest

The City of Mirrors

The center of the Tomosic network of roads and teleport gates to sites of interest in the Complex is the City of Mirrors. Its name comes both from its access to multiple worlds and from its physical nature. Situated in the paraelemental region between Earth and Air, the entire settlement is carved from a stratum of glassy stone. Siting the transport hub here provides the features of a temperature warmer than Earth, a steady supply of breathable air, and great beauty: the lights of the city reflect off of the faceted dome above and flash rainbow reflections across the Grand Spiral where the teleport gates cluster. Whole buildings are carved from the native glass, etched and sculpted with geometric precision and artistry of which the Greeks would have been proud.

The City of Mirrors boasts a permanently enchanted double-width gate to the capital city of the Tomosic Confederation

on Terra. The gate is guarded at all times by a detachment of soldiers on the lookout for attempts to destroy this economically valuable highway. Surrounding the wide plaza are the major trade highways leading to other sites in the Complex and the gates to nearby friendly worlds. Rising above this is the Grand Spiral, a slow-rising ramp dotted at regular intervals with teleport gates to useful sites too far away to conveniently walk. As new sites are found, more of the Spiral is carved out of the rock and the dome above is expanded.

Elaia, the City of Lamps

Deeper in the Plane of Earth can be found all manner of soil and stone, even Essential Earth appearing naturally and replenishing itself out of the plane's energies. Materials can be mined here and physically brought back to Tomos via the gate network, whereupon the earth from the Astral often exhibits curious and valuable properties. Orichalcum arms Tomosic soldiers, worked by smiths initiated in the secrets necessary to fashion the metal; Essential Earth helps the island nation feed a larger population than its soils could support; precious gems adorn jewelry and are worked into sizable powerstones; naturally charged manastones of impressive sizes are sometimes found and auctioned off for high prices.

Elaia sits near all this industry, housing its workers and serving as a market town. It is carved out of the Plane of Earth, the city sitting inside an upward-opening cone pierced by pillars and crisscrossed by bridges full of houses and shops. The natural cold and darkness there are banished by lamps on every corner, fueled with pitch dug easily nearby, the flames flickering all around one's field of view. This is the place in the Complex to get your hands on high-quality raw materials, and to find craftsmen in stone who work close to nature.

Blib

Water is life. Where there is liquid water and any sort of organic chemical, it seems life can arise and some kind of adaptation survive. Where the Plane of Water receives liquid oils and fats, natural life has arisen even in the unnatural conditions of the Elemental Complex: flora, fauna, and even intelligent life. "Blib" is the best approximation human travellers make of the native name of the Bubble Kingdom, where humans are confined to carefully-maintained pockets of air while their octopus hosts swim around them. The two species mostly bemuse each other; Tomosic tools and magic adapt poorly to usage submerged in water, though some teaching in mathematics has been well received. A small outpost of the octopi has taken up residence in the Ring Sea, the largest freshwater body on the Tomosic homeworld. From there, they occasionally venture forth into alien air as carefully swathed as humans back home.

(A saltwater race mentioned in **GURPS Banestorm** may be cousins that evolved in a region of this plane with higher salinity.)

Storm

As far from the solid earth as it is possible to be in the Complex, the elemental region called Storm appears as planetoids of water floating through atmosphere, lit by incessant lightning flashes and whipped to frothing fury by howling winds. Air, fire, and water are at play here unconstrained by stubborn stone, and Weather College spells work at peak efficiency. At the center of one of these spheres of water is said to be fabled Eye of the Hurricane, an object (or site, or creature -- the rumors are vague) capable of unleashing militarily devastating weather on a foe's homeland. It's also a great place to challenge your sailing skills. The few sea monster fisheries that survive here can always use brave pilots.

Adventure Seeds

Impostor!: The notion of doubles has disturbing implications for religion and philosophy. At present, only a few people have reliably documented doubles (someone on another timeline physically similar, with a similar name

and life history). The Order of the Tetrahedron has begun investigating reports that multiple known doubles on worlds beyond Amalle are turning up dead. There are some citizens on and off Tomos and the Varen Union who would be more comfortable if their alternates just went away; but are the citizens of Amalle perpetrators or targets?

Attack of the Reptile Men: Tomos' philosophical overtures never went over very well with the reptile men of Gabrook, and their culturally expansionist outlook is threatening to local rulers and religions who don't want their history to be washed away in a foreign tide. A large-scale military campaign between two worlds would center on the chokepoints of invasion at the gates, with the kobolds seeking to mediate peace as trade drops drastically while the humans struggle with the followers of Bozdaag. Ultimately, a Tomos threatened by superior barbarian numbers might simply *destroy* the natural gate as best it could, collapsing the caverns for miles around it. War creates all manner of opportunities for adventures in this vein.

Everyday Miracles: Trailblazing explorers face all kinds of dangers and opportunities for untold riches in the Complex. Members of the Order of the Tetrahedron steadily scout out new worlds and make contact in roles very similar to Infinity's Penetration Service, skipping any niceties about keeping the Secret; meanwhile, economically-motivated prospectors and natural scientists find room for nearly every motivation of humanity within the Complex and its colonies.

Greetings from Earth, and Earth, and Earth: Putting Tomos on Quantum 1 sets it comfortably far away from Reich-5, Homeline, and Centrum, making these crosstime powers mutually inaccessible to each other, except for Reich-5 (which is low-mana). Of the three, if Reich-5 is Tomos' first introduction to a high-tech society deep paranoia will be likely to set in once any serious examination of the social consequences is carried out; vice versa, if Reich-5 ever gains knowledge of the Divided

world has yet to occur to Tomosics. The broader tracts of Yetzirah, Briah, the Abyss, and Atziluth remain unguessed territory. The theory of alternate timelines has not occurred since the worlds to which Tomosics travel lack significantly parallel geographies or histories, though philosophers discuss the implications of the occasional doubles found and the fact that the stars are similar everywhere. Tomosic cartographers *are* beginning to notice that large continents are the rule rather than the exception, and that similar continental outlines appear to be common as well.

Indications of high technology are only vaguely coming to the attention of perceptive analyzers of offworld rumors. In a pattern similar to the worlds encountered by Infinity, Tomos has first encountered "nearby" worlds where magic and technology are similar to its own, gradually getting stranger as the hike from the City of Mirrors gets longer. Should it ever encounter a high-tech world, it would quarantine travel there and endeavor to obscure its own existence while understanding the technology and underlying science required to replicate it. Stealing educational textbooks and hastily re-engineering high technology would be the most palatable solution; spells of Steal Skill and Permanent Possession on kidnapped foreign technologists are ethically unpleasant but could be perceived as necessary against a high-tech threat. (Such spells are little studied in Tomos; necromancy is more likely to be found in the Varen Union and Communication & Empathy mages have advanced their art most in the Sanguine Alliance, meaning that Tomos could find itself required to admit a deficiency of knowledge and request assistance from former enemies against a worse threat.)

Land and Gate spells, the Infinite Worlds are in serious trouble. Happier consequences could ensue if Tomosics make contact with a Q5 magical alternate that Infinity can contact, though Infinity's few intelligence agents in German technical laboratories on Reich-5 could learn of contact with the Divided Land and risk an attempt to make contact with Tomos, directing them to a more convenient location. One of the few advantages Tomos would have fighting the Reich would be a possible effect of the Astral on high-tech equipment; an optional rule in *GURPS Cabal* gives devices beyond TL4 severe penalties for use as the loose physics of the plane plays havoc with their internal workings.

O For A Muse of Fire: *Henry V*

"O for a muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention,
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!
Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,
Assume the port of Mars; and at his heels,
Leash'd in like hounds, should famine, sword and fire
Crouch for employment."
-- William Shakespeare, *Henry V,* Prologue:1-8

'Tis not Crispin, but Christmas, come round at last, but 'twill do, 'twill do. Once more I call on [Shakespeare's muse](#) to light our Yule fires of speculation and wonderment, examining the dramaturgical underpinnings behind the Great Work of English literature. Once more, we see the vague outlines of magical workings behind a fog of blood and smoke. Once more, then, into the breach . . .

"Vouchsafe to those that have not read the story,
That I may prompt them; and of such as have,
I humbly pray them to admit th'excuse
Of time, of numbers, and due course of things,
Which cannot in their huge and proper life
Be here presented."
-- William Shakespeare, *Henry V,* V:0:1-6

As the play opens, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely, worried that King Henry V will confiscate their property, decide to buy him off by funding his upcoming war on France. Henry demands an arcane legal justification from the churchmen for his claim to the French throne as a way of tying them to his campaign. He then orders the execution of three noble traitors in French pay. Meanwhile, his old companion Falstaff lies dying offstage, discussed by his cronies Nym, Bardolph, Pistol, and the former Mistress Quickly. In France, the Dauphin and his Constable discuss Henry; the Constable urges the Dauphin not to underestimate the young king, and eventually the French try to buy Henry off with an offer of marriage to Princess Katherine.

Henry will not be turned aside, however, and invades France. His army includes Bardolph, Pistol, and Nym, under the command of the doughty Fluellen, a comic Welshman. Henry besieges and sacks Harfleur and marches deeper into France, incidentally hanging Bardolph and Nym for looting a church. In Paris Princess Katherine attempts English lessons for her potential husband, while the French again try to dissuade Henry. Undaunted, he vows to accept battle even in his weakened state if the French have the courage to offer it. Near Agincourt, the French stay up late boasting and gambling, while King Henry goes among his men in disguise, nearly getting into a brawl with one Williams at one point. The next day, after a stirring speech by Henry, the English win an overwhelming victory. After some more byplay with Henry, Williams, Fluellen, and Pistol, the scene shifts to Henry's successful courtship of Katherine, although the Epilogue points out that their son will be the feckless Henry VI, who will lose everything his father gained and more.

"Then shall our names,
Familiar in his mouth as household words,
Harry the king, Bedford and Exeter,
Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester,
Be in their flowing cups freshly remember'd.
This story shall the good man teach his son;
And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,

But we in it shall be remembered."
-- William Shakespeare, *Henry V,* IV:iii:56-64

The printer James Roberts entered *Henry V* in the Stationer's Register on August 4, 1600 in a (failed) attempt to prevent pirated manuscripts from circulating, but Shakespeare most likely wrote the play the year before. Not only does the famous "wooden O" in the Prologue call to mind the Globe Theatre, new-built in the spring of 1599, but the reference in Act V to "the general of our gracious Empress/. . . from Ireland coming/Bringing rebellion broached upon his sword" is universally considered a reference to the Earl of Essex' campaign in Ireland, which began in March of that year. Since he returned after a miserable failure in September, the lines celebrating his "welcome" were probably written some time before that. Admittedly, this argument wobbles a bit, since the Curtain (Shakespeare's previous stage) could also be described as a "wooden O," and the lines in Act V don't actually appear in the pirated edition of 1600. The first documented performance wasn't until January of 1605, for King James, but longstanding academic tradition holds that *Henry V* was the first play shown at the Globe when it opened in June of 1599.

Shakespeare took the story from English history (even English hagiography) via his old workhorse, Holinshed's *Chronicles* of 1587, with some bits thrown in from Edward Halle's *The Union of . . . Lancastre and York* and Robert Fabyan's *New Chronicles* of 1516. He may have lifted even more of the play from a "Harey the Vth" listed in Henslowe's diary and possibly performed (illegally) by Shakespeare's troupe in the mid-1590s. Parts of *that* play may be in the anonymous *Famous Victories of Henry V* entered in the Stationer's Register on May 14, 1594, and parts of that play show up in Shakespeare. Shakespeare's *Henry V* is also, of course, a sequel to his own, very popular, *Henry IV Part I* and *Part II,* which introduced Pistol, Nym, Mistress Quickly, and Bardolph, as well as the figure whose spirit, exorcised but lingering in death, hangs over Henry V and *Henry V* -- Falstaff.

"Not to-day, O Lord!
O! not to-day, think not upon the fault
My father made in compassing the crown.
I Richard's body have interr'd anew,
And on it have bestow'd more contrite tears
Than from it issu'd forced drops of blood.
Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay,
Who twice a day their wither'd hands hold up
Toward heaven, to pardon blood; and I have built
Two chantries, where the sad and solemn priests
Sing still for Richard's soul."
-- William Shakespeare, *Henry V,* IV:i:181-191

The through-line of the two *Henry IV* plays is the jovial brotherhood of "Prince Hal" and his companion in sin and revelry, Sir John Falstaff. At the end of *Part II,* Hal, now crowned King Henry V, forcibly and famously separates himself from his anima -- "I know thee not, old man" and categorizes him as not a knight but "a fool and jester." In *Henry V,* Falstaff is broken by the separation, and dies (offstage) as Henry orders the execution of three of his other friends, the traitors Cambridge, Scroop, and Grey. By this act, Henry is reversing the action of Richard II (and Shakespeare is reversing the action of *Richard II*) who left traitors alive, and was killed by three of them. Unfortunately for Henry V, one of the traitors spared by Richard was his father, Henry Bolingbroke, who usurped the throne as Henry IV.

Henry V continuously tries to shed his sins, be they the personal sins of Falstaff or the royal sins of his father. He weeps "contrite tears" over Richard II, re-inters the body, and pays for ritual intercession by both commoners and clerics. Like Richard II, he puts aside his crown for a common cloak, attempting to re-connect to the true blood royal of England. This act is also a sort of mystical disguise, of hiding from judgement -- as Williams puts it, "Your majesty came not like yourself." And even then, Henry fears retribution, ritually transferring his fault (in the shape of Williams' glove, taken as a token of offense) to Fluellen, his new, noble, non-Falstaffian twin. (Fluellen spends much comic dialogue comparing himself to Henry, and Henry to "Alexander the Pig.") Henry's whole invasion of France (like Alexander's invasion of Persia) can be seen as an act of atonement, both crusade (remember his insistence on Church support) and scapegoating, carrying blood sin overseas to be washed away in patriotic gore, or to be left on France's

"tawny ground."

"A largess universal, like the sun
His liberal eye doth give to every one,
Thawing cold fear. Then mean and gentle all,
Behold, as may unworthiness define,
A little touch of Harry in the night."
-- William Shakespeare, *Henry V,* IV:0:44-48

And for a while, it worked. In the play, Henry is not just Alexander reborn in war, but a fair, firm, monarch with just enough of the common touch -- the perfect dream of English kingship. He effortlessly bends the Church to his will, spies out treason in an eyeblink, and wins over the Princess of France in a single narration, in common soldier's prose no less. The play refers to Henry as "like the sun," and while wooing Katherine Henry compares himself to the sun in constancy. The Duke of Exeter compares Henry to "the former lions of your blood," implying none too subtly that Henry is just such a lion.

Interestingly, the real, historical Henry created much of this legend and imagery himself, just as the play's Henry confidently asserts that he (and his "band of brothers") "from this day to the ending of the world" will be remembered as latter-day heroes of the mold of Gideon. The historical Henry identified himself with the Trojans and their legendary descendants the Romans, using the emblem of "the sun in splendor" as well as the heraldic lions of England. Henry's glorious legacy inspired Edward IV, who identified himself with King Arthur and (despite being a York rather than a Lancaster) with King Henry V. This overlay of Henry and Arthur echoes back down through Shakespeare's play when Mistress Quickly tells how Falstaff has died and gone "to Arthur's bosom." On the surface, this is a comic malapropism for "Abraham's bosom," the colloquial term for Heaven -- but it also implies that Falstaff is reunited in death with his beloved "Prince Hal," King Arthur reborn, despite Henry's desperate evasions.

"HEN. . . . I cannot so conjure up the spirit of love in her, that he will appear in his true likeness.
BUR. Pardon the frankness of my mirth if I answer you for that. If you would conjure in her, you must make a circle; if conjure up Love in her in his true likeness, he must appear naked and blind."
-- William Shakespeare, *Henry V,* V:ii:149-150

The lines above are the most explicit magical exchange in the play, as Henry and the Duke of Burgundy discourse, almost idly, on the proper methods of magically invoking love between Henry and Katherine, between England and France. Henry deprecates his magical abilities -- or is he asking a question, asking "How?" Burgundy (who represents a kind of Mercury, apparently, changing sides and politics with ease) responds with a clear statement of the Agrippan rules of decanic magic: Henry must conjure with the proper emblem or icon or aethyr of Love, which is to say Cupid, "naked and blind." (Or is he referring to those enigmatic [cherubim](#), who seemingly embody just the sort of very intermingling that Henry desires?) And Henry responds with "naked" prose (rather than courtly iambic pentameter) and "blind" expression of love rather than hints or coquetry -- and it works. Elsewhere in the play, Nym (whose name actually means "thief" -- another Mercurial reference?) denies Pistol's "solus," (a pun, among other things, on solace -- and on the Sun) saying "I am not Barbason, you cannot conjure me." Nym is inert, he says, to magic -- and he is hung, expelled from Henry's Working.

And of course the most famous conjuring, the most famous invocation perhaps in all of Shakespeare begins the play: "O for a muse of fire!" In other words, Shakespeare himself (who traditionally is ascribed the part of the Chorus) invokes an elemental, a "Muse of fire." This calls to mind, perhaps, the alchemist's quest to spark the "philosophical fire" (also called "the secret fire"), a fire of magical potency, in order to complete the Great Work. Which is interesting, not least because Edward IV, our would-be avatar of Henry V, kept one alchemist (Sir George Ripley) as a some-time advisor on ceremonial and another (Ripley's protégé Sir Thomas Norton) as his actual privy councilor. Ripley famously separates the Great Work into twelve stages, one for each sign of the Zodiac -- and counting the Prologue, there are 24 scenes in *Henry V.* As Shakespeare "twins" Henry and Fluellen, has he set a twin Working aboil?

"RAM. My lord constable, the armour that I saw in your tent to-night, are those stars or suns upon it?

CON. Stars, my lord.
DAU. Some of them will fall to-morrow, I hope."
-- William Shakespeare, *Henry V,* III:vii:31-33

The battle of Agincourt -- fought, by the way, on the saint's day of twins, Crispin and Crispinian -- thus becomes the "Torment of the Metals," the tumult in which all ingredients are melted in the secret fire. There are hints in the play of this: during Agincourt, Pistol refuses "brass" and captures "Monsieur le Fer" -- Fire has taken Iron. Even more evocatively, the Duke of Orleans greets the morning of the battle with "the sun doth gild our armour," a clear reference to the solar Henry transmuting their base iron to gold. Ripley refers to the Torment of Metals as sublimation, fermentation (literally, the addition of a spirit), and exaltation -- a process recapitulated in Henry's "St. Crispin's Day" oration, and in the battle itself.

Calcination, the initial burning, is easily seen as Henry's flaming up at the Dauphin's insult in Act I. The solution, or thinning, might be both the exorcism of Falstaff (the very emblem of "base matter") and the execution of the traitors. Ripley's "separation by water" is so clearly the invasion itself, crossing the Channel; while putrefaction may be either the Act II scenes in Mistress Quickly's brothel or the scenes in the French court or both. As we begin Act III, Henry (and Shakespeare) unites England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland in his army (through Gower, Fluellen, Jamy, and Macmorris) -- Ripley's coagulation? Cibation, the feeding with liquid, runs throughout, from Henry's tears watering Richard II's body (the true Stone?) to the blood soaking into the battlefield. The play ends with Henry filling Williams' glove with gold (multiplication, inherent also in Henry's frantic identity-shifting) and returning to France (projection) to pursue the [Chemical Marriage](#) of Red King and White Queen with Princess Katherine. Henry refers in his wooing to "sun and moon," to seal the deal.

"The flat unraised spirits that hath dar'd
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
So great an object: can this cockpit hold
The vasty fields of France? or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt?"
-- William Shakespeare, *Henry V,* Prologue:10-15

And all of that Work occurs "within this wooden O," inside a carefully constructed and aligned spheroid. Inside, that is, an athanor, which is the Globe itself, fed by "a muse of fire." And once more we have a royal alchemist, this time Robert Fludd, to conjure with. Fludd and Shakespeare shared the patronage of King James I, and Fludd recapitulated his Hermetic arts in an engraving he called the *Theatrum Orbi,* the "theatre of the world," which is to say, the Globe Theatre. We may note, in this context, that Elizabeth's magus John Dee had designed stage sets and machinery while at Oxford, and would have been familiar with Vitruvius' "perfect stage," designed to faultless [sacred-geometrical](#) patterns. We also know that the second Globe (built in 1613 on the burned ruins of Shakespeare's Globe) was [aligned](#) to the midsummer sunrise axis -- just like Stonehenge -- and that likely therefore so was Shakespeare's "wooden O." Shakespeare, in other words, built an egg (round, like Stonehenge) on the [midsummer](#) alignment, quite possibly using Dee's Vitruvian sketches, and then invoked "a muse of fire," powering the Great Work through the already alchemically-potent Henry V to complete his athanor, possibly on its debut performance. A tradition that somehow has remained vital -- the first performance at the new Globe in 1997 began with the Prologue and Act IV's torment of metals from *Henry V.*

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

Pass It Here: Four Fantasy Themed Drugs

for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by R. Ciulla

While these substances were designed under the assumption that they were to be used for a fantasy campaign, there is no reason such substances cannot be easily converted for use in other genres. Whether new, secret drugs of a modern day campaign; hot, synthetic chemicals on the mean streets of a dystopian cyberpunk world, dangerous substances of strange new planets; or odd chemicals found in the back alleys of far-flung future space stations, the GM is encouraged to use them as he sees fit.

Dream Smoke

Dream Smoke is an addictive substance harvested from a type of latticed fungus. Like most fungi it grows best in warm, damp places . . . usually the wetter, the better. Dream smoke crops are often grown in cellars. A simple cellar with a wood burning stove (for warming the room) and water tossed on the floor now and again (to keep things nice and damp) will work. To achieve greater yields, more serious growers use complicated steam blowers and small water fed tubing that continuously spray the room with water, producing a humid, damp environment. The most commonly used food source for the fungus are wood chips scattered across the floor. The fungus begins to spore within days, forming baseball-sized spheres which slowly change into open air latticed structures. The mature lattice is very fragile and must be picked with great care in order to avoid damage. Total time to maturity ranges from 10 days in the best warm, wet environments to over 30 days in common wood-burning, water-bucket cellars. Recreational growers often don't even use their entire cellar floor, simply growing a small crop in and around the wood stove, wetting the floor and the wood chips around it.

Once picked, the fungi must be stored in a cool, dry place (usually in a metal container or large clay pots) for no less than three to five days depending on temperature and humidity. The latticed body of the fungi shrivels, collapsing in on itself into a long tangle of root-like structures with a tough fibrous texture. Normally chopped up for convenience, the shriveled fungi is roughly half a meter in length, one of them typically yielding 20 doses on average size. Each dose is one chopped piece of the plant, and when burned produces a thick, pale blue smoke, for roughly 10 minutes before the piece of the plant is consumed. Users inhale the smoke.

Dream Smoke is a mild depressant that causes euphoria and a faint feeling of drowsiness. Normally used as a relaxant to aide in sleep, it sees casual use as well for the pleasant feeling it produces along with its characteristic warm, drowsiness. Users often place their bit of the fungus is a small bowl to set it alight. More private use is normally seen in the bed chamber by way of a small, squat, round table vase. Styles vary wildly, but all of them incorporate small open slats at the top to allow smoke to escape. Dream Smoke vases can be as ornate and as unique as anyone can image. Coming in a variety of fashionable styles and shapes, these vases sell briskly in marketplaces near regions where Dream Smoke is common.

Overdose potential: There is very little risk of overdose with this substance.

Dream Smoke is a highly addictive, cheap substance. Legality varies. Users gain the irritating afflictions euphoric and drowsy, if they fail a HT-2 roll, for 10 minutes times the margin of failure. An HT-2 roll is normally required after 10 minutes of exposure.

Grit Eye

Grit Eye, simply known as Grit, is a thick, viscous liquid permeated with dark, abrasive particulates. Grit is a popular -

- but dangerous and expensive -- stimulant. Users are characterized by watering eyes and prevalent blinking. Habitual use has been known to cause eye damage up to and including blindness. Many a broken, blind beggar can trace their current woes back to Grit. Grit's origins lie with the Vendu plant. A high altitude scrub bush that bears a waxy yellow, but juicy fruit. The scrub bush's leaves are thick, tough, and abrasive frequently requiring a knife to separate them from the plant. Vendu does not grow in low altitudes and flourishes best between altitudes of 6,000 to 8,000 feet. Once the fruit and leaves have been picked, the fruit is chopped into several pieces and tossed, along with several of the thick leaves, into a pot of water. Once the mixture begins to boil, the heat must be reduced and the mixture allowed to simmer for no less than half a fortnight. The result is a thick, viscous layer of yellow liquid that slowly rises to the top of the water. The layer is skimmed off and poured into a large bowl. Draining the pot leaves a fine layer of an abrasive, silty substance from the boiled leaves which is added to the viscous yellow liquid. Grit is often stored in one-inch glass vials, and is easily identifiable by its deep amber color and the dark particulate matter that lay suspended inside it. Six fruit and a double handful of leaves will produce a dozen vials of Grit. Each vial houses four doses.

Users administer Grit by drawing some of the substance out of whatever it's kept in, dropping a bit of the thick, gritty liquid onto each open eye, shutting them, and moving them back and forth to give maximum saturation. In a pinch, a user can dab a bit on his thumb, and gently swipe it across the open eyes. Users must make an HT-4 roll to resist the effects, which typically takes effect within thirty 30 due to saturation so close to a mucus membrane. The effects of Grit last a number of hours equal to the HT-4 roll's margin of failure. Users immediately gain 1 fatigue point (if any are lost), one level of Overconfidence (or an increase in level if Overconfidence is already possessed), and High Pain Threshold (as the drug stimulates the subject's nerves to give a continuous warm sensation across the body and pain receptors are muted). The only irritant are the subjects eyes which continuously feel as if they have sand in them giving users a -1 to all vision rolls.

Once the drug wears off, users become mildly depressed and irritable (1 level of bad temper and chronic depression which will add to any existing conditions), and suffer the loss of two fatigue points along with a continuing -1 to all vision rolls for a number of hours equal to the previous hours that the user was under the effects of the drug. Concurrent use of the drug for a number of days equal to the user's HT, without a dry period of the user's HT in days, requires a HT-2 roll to avoid permanent eye damage (user gains farsighted or nearsighted, at the GM's choice). Continued use in the above fashion will require another roll as described above and, if failed, the acquisition of the previous bad vision option that was not picked by the GM. A third failed roll, after continued use, will result in permanent blindness with a failed aforementioned HT-2 roll.

Overdose potential: Taking more than one dose of Grit within a 24 hour period has the possibility to cause a fatal heart attack, if an HT roll is failed. In addition, each additional dose past the first counts against total days for concurrent use of the drug resulting in an HT-2 roll to avoid permanent eye damage.

Grit is an expensive -- but only mildly addictive -- substance. Legality varies.

Cacophony

Commonly referred to as Caw or Blackbird, this substance is derived from the highly poisonous berries of the Nak'tid bush. Nak'tid bushes grow only in temperate climates around shallow, brackish lakes. The juice of the berries make an excellent contact poison, and must be gathered and crushed very carefully. Contact with the juice of the berries can be fatal. The juice must be boiled over high heat in a well ventilated room, as part of the juice goes to gas. The fumes can lead to lung irritation (HT-1 roll to avoid coughing; critical failure on this roll leads to a severe allergic reaction causing the throat to close up; treat as choking). Once the boil off has taken place, what's left is a thin white liquid that can be ingested orally or rubbed into the skin. Cacophony is a hallucinogen whose primary effect is to induce a very specific form of synethisia which manifests auditorily from colors that the user of the drug looks at. In effect, the user is able to "hear" colors. Secondary effects include a general lowering of inhibitions (User gains Lecherousness (9) and a temporary suspension of any mental disadvantages that would interfere with social interaction such as, but not limited to, shyness), and a slight inebriation (user is tipsy). Two handfuls of berries crushed for juice, then boiled, yield about two hundred milliliters of the drug.

Cacophony takes effect in one minute if the user fails a HT-4 roll, and lasts a number of hours equal to the margin of

failure (minimum one hour). Once the effects of the drug have ended, users are afflicted with a mild headache (moderate pain). The very mild side effects make this drug more dangerous as users often throw caution to the wind regarding its possible long term effects.

Long Term Effects: Habitual use of Cacophony for a period longer than HT weeks without a user going off the drug for a number of weeks equal to 20-HT weeks (minimum one week) must make two HT associated rolls. The first roll at HT+4 checks for damage to two parts of the the brain, the first being Broca's area and the second the auditory lobe of the brain. Failing this roll will produce consistent auditory hallucinations. At first the voices are merely an irritant, but continued abuse of Cacophony can lead to more serious hallucinations (users gains Phantom voices/1 on a failed roll). Auditory hallucinations take the form of a babbling voice when looking at colors. The second roll is at HT. Failure indicates the development of acute episodes of migraines, that have the potential to grow progressively worse if the drug is continuously abused. [user gains chronic pain mild severity two-hour interval (-15)].

If the user continues in this fashion without going off the drug for the above stated increment of time, then the next two HT checks (after a further HT number of weeks) will be at HT+2 and HT-2 respectively. If the previous rolls failed, auditory hallucinations and migraine episodes will increase in severity [Users gain Phantom voices/2 and Chronic pain severe severity 4 hour interval (-15)].

Users of the drug continue to make HT rolls in this way but HT rolls can go no lower than HT-4 for both rolls. Critical failure at late HT-4, for Chronic pain increases, will result in epilepsy as well as an increase in chronic pain (if the user has not reached the maximum level of chronic pain).

The pain experienced by long-term users of the drug often leads to abuse of secondary pain management drugs. Cacophony is widely known to be kept in small containers that resemble miniature wine or water skins. Small pieces of animal bladder or skin are cut and sewn tightly together so that users can gently squeeze the container and squirt the drug into their mouths or onto their skin. Containers for the drug are roughly the circumference of a half dollar. Each container of Cacophony contains about a dozen doses.

Overdose potential: Taking more than one dose of Cacophony in a 24 hour period requires the user to roll vs. HT with a -2 penalty for each dose past the first. Failure indicates possible violent delusions (roll vs. will or experience the equivalent of a severe level delusion: "Anything with color is trying to kill me!"), and pin-prick hemorrhaging in the brain (mild pain affliction with increases in severity per each additional dose of cacophony taken in a 24 hour period). Critical failure indicates an aneurysm and death.

Cacophony is a cheap, mildly addictive substance. Legality varies.

Quint

A bastardization of the word Quiescent, meaning "calm." A dangerous perversion of a common nervous system depressant, Quint partially suppresses the part of the brain known as the amygdala. Users of the drug find it quite difficult, but not impossible, to experience fear response. This results in an overall improvement in combat efficiency for anyone with the skills to back up such an advantage, but can result in a terrible death for those that don't have the skills to back up their new, fearless nature. Quint's parent drug is processed from a hardy type of canyon scrub grass called Nordok. When boiled over high heat, between two and three hours, then diluted Nordok produces a strong, very commonly employed relaxant. If the parent drug is not diluted (the standard practice in the legal drug's manufacture), the resulting chemical is a bitter fluid tasting faintly of dry pecan and burnt rubber. For this reason, the drug is often added to some other strong substance in order to kill the taste. Any strong-tasting liquid will do. Oral ingestion of Quint without adding it to another liquid requires an immediate HT-3 roll to avoid vomiting. Popular with soldiers, mercenaries, and those in violent professions, Quint is often added to strong ales, meads, beers, wines, juices or the like. Quint is often referred to in the vernacular as liquid courage, fearless beer, or murder juice. Quint comes in vials of single doses, and it's rare for it to be packaged any differently.

Quint takes effect in HT minutes if orally ingested or HT seconds if injected. The user gets a HT-6 roll to resist. Quint remains viable in an average user's system for five hours before it begins to break down (HT/2 hours). Users under the

effects of Quint suffer a generalized suppression of their fear response, gaining five levels of the Fearless advantage, and any self control rolls for disadvantages that evoke a fear response (such as phobias) are only triggered on a roll of 17 or 18 on 3d. Users also gain Overconfidence (-15), or have their overconfidence resistance roll worsened by one level (to -12, -9, or -6 respectively) if they already possess the disadvantage.

Quint can be dangerous with repeated use, eventually damaging the subject's ability to process their fear response as well as other emotions. Make an HT-3 roll after HT months to avoid a permanent addition of one level of fearless, one level of overconfidence (at -15 to begin or worsened by one level if overconfidence is already one of a character's disadvantages) and the callous disadvantage. A character must roll against their HT-3 every HT months, or pick up one additional level of fearless, and one additional level increase of overconfidence. Five eventual failures of this HT-3 roll will add the Killjoy disadvantage as the drug ravages the brain.

Overdose: Taking more than one dose in a 24 hour period requires a HT-2 roll with an additional -2 to HT with each successive dose. Failure indicates damage (1d toxic; Two one hour cycles) to the subject's nervous system and brain, resulting in a permanent -4 DX penalty (possible recovery only with spent character points), and gaining the Epilepsy disadvantage. Failure by 5 or more gives the character Killjoy as well. Critical failure means immediate coma and possibly death along with the usual 1d toxic, DX penalty, Epilepsy, and Killjoy if the character pulls through the coma.

A Decidedly Different Dwarf

for *d20 System*

by Caias Ward

Tamak and Azioc Stormhammer stood in Axwyrd Pass, side by side. The passage was 10 feet wide, opening to a chamber 50 feet on a side. They each claimed half the passage, half the way that none of the Sea Baron raiders would pass.

And try to pass they did. A force of a hundred strong, their Rahavin Shock Troopers, armed with long spears, set themselves upon the brothers. The Sea Barons sought the prize of mithril from the Axwyrd Mines, sought to destroy the two who guarded the Deep Below. But the brothers would not be pushed aside. They set themselves in place, their long chain axes cutting deep into the invaders. Many were the wounds they brothers took, but they would not topple. Their blood flowed silver, and the guard of dwarves that stood behind them, the ones that watched the brothers dispatch a hundred men without falling, knew the clan had been blessed by the Forge Father.

He has sent two of his ForgeBorn, the dwur, to protect them. Thus, this day, Hammerstrike 7 of the Year of Receding Rust, marks the blessing of the Forge Father upon the Kessel Clan.

--Chronicle of Thangrim Axwyrd, Scholar of Clan Axwyrd, Voice of the Forge Father

* * *

Dwarves are a staple of many fantasy worlds. Fierce warriors, dour and grim at times, they mine much wealth from the earth and have a great devotion to family and clan. They have a great hatred for giants and goblinoids, and their feelings towards elves are less than cordial. Supposedly crafted in the workshop of the Forge Father, they are workmanship and dedication personified.

But the dwarves may have not been the first gift of the Forge Father to the world. He made another gift, a race with skin of stone painted ruddy and blood of oil and mithril. They were strong of body and will, but as perfect as they were, the Forge Father knew they were not suited for this world. While they were industrious, their passion was not in crafting and family but in simply serving the Forge Father. While they were warriors, they fought not for clan and family but for the pure joy of fighting. Their hatred of giantkin was not from wrongs upon them but because the Forge Father ordered it so.

So back to the Eternal Forge the Forge Father went, breathing life into his new creations, the dwarves. They were not as strong, not as friendly, but they had passion and souls. They would fit in well with the rest of the young world the Forge Father sought to populate.

Still, his first creation, the dwur, still had purpose. He knew they were simple-purposed creatures, but they were good of heart and loyal. While not passionate, they were curious and honest. He gave the dwur a new edict, to hide themselves among the dwarves and foster them. They would show the dwarves the secrets of mining, the art of warfare, and the value of clan and family by questioning the foundations of dwarven society. In time, the dwur would retreat from the world, to be called upon again should the need be great.

What Calls a Dwur?

Dwarf elders and thanes don't know what calls a dwur to a clan. Sometimes, whole clans can fall without assistance, yet a single child's prayer can brings two dwur to help in some great undertaking. However, the dwarf scholar Thangrim Axwyrd has, through extensive research, narrowed down several conditions that were in common with all

recorded appearances of the dwur:

- the calamity against a clan of dwarves often is not the clan's fault
- the dwarves have expended great resources of their own in order to combat the threat against them but still need help
- an innocent or faithful dwarf has suffered greatly at the hands of oppressors and has made a call for aid
- dwarves have rejected a means to end their suffering when it would have harmed innocents, even though it would have saved dwarven lives.

Should a dwarven clan prove worthy in one or more of these ways, a dwur will arrive under various guises: a young dwarf adventurer, a merchant, or a host of other dwarven guises. They will often find an innocent and faithful dwarf and strike up a friendship. Not revealing himself, the dwur will help the clan as though he were an ordinary dwarf. Soon, however, the minor abilities of the dwur will show; dwur blood is silver and any object he polishes will stay clean for days, no matter how dirty its surroundings. He will start calling for more action against a threat, often inspiring the dwarves to greater deeds. So long as the dwarves seek a good purpose, the dwur will stand by them.

Heart of Mithril

Even as they focus on the protection of dwarves, the dwur are curious creatures. Sometimes, they will strike up romantic relationships with dwarves that run quite counter to dwarven traditions of courtship and ritual. These relationships grow in passion far beyond was is normal for a dwur; these relationships often cause mixed feelings as a dwur attracts and is attracted to a married man or woman, especially since these relationships invariably result in the birth of a child. Many keep these dalliances hidden, hiding the true parentage of the child as long as they can. Still, a child born from a dwur and a dwarf eventually stands out on his or her own and carves a unique place in dwarven society.

Even in their normal relationships, the dwur cause no end of confusion to dwarves. The dwur constantly question tradition, from the need to follow dwarven leadership to holding to doctrines of faith in the Forge Father. Some dwarves have even called the appearance of a dwur heresy and sought to drive them from their clans. These are sad times, for the reasons that dwur question is twofold: first, because they themselves do not understand always why dwarves act the way they do and they wish to learn, and second because they seek to strengthen the resolve the dwarven clans. By questioning tradition, the dwur hope to make dwarves understand why what they hold as tradition is so important.

After the crisis that brought a dwur to a clan is averted, the clan will many times find itself subject to another upheaval as artisans are inspired, young dwarves seek the adventuring life and old beliefs are turned on-end. These changes will shape a clan for generations to come.

Using The Dwur In Your Campaign

A player character dwur often finds himself in the world with no knowledge of his task other than what his heart and beliefs dictate. Such dwur gravitate to dwarves in particular and good people in general. An adventuring lifestyle allows them to fulfill their duty, experience the world and satisfy their curiosity; they often do non-dwarven things such as fishing or painting while out among the world.

For campaigns looking to add a touch of a divine, a dwur is an ideal gateway for a combat character to be part of a holy mission. A dwur is also a good counterpoint for dwarves, often inquiring about the sense of what a dwarf considers "normal" behavior and confounding them with "undwarfly" behaviors. As mentioned before, the appearance of a dwur is often a sign of great things, and an easy way to thrust a character and his companions into the center of any story.

Dwur

Medium Construct (Dwarf, Extraplanar, Good, Lawful)
Hit Dice: 4d10+39 (67 hp)
Initiative: +1
Speed: 20 ft. (4 squares)
Armor Class: 26 (+1 Dex, +6 natural, +9 Full Plate +1), touch 11, flat-footed 18
Base Attack/Grapple: +3/+9
Attack: One slam +9 1d6+9 or masterwork dwarven warchain +10 1d10+9
Full Attack: One slam +9 1d6+9 or masterwork dwarven warchain +10 1d10+9
Space/Reach: 5 ft. /5 ft. (10ft. with dwarven warchain)
Special Attacks: Dwarf traits, Construct Traits
Special Qualities: Damage reduction 5/adamantine, darkvision 120 ft, dwarf traits, fast healing 5, low light vision, will to flesh
Saves: Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +2
Abilities: Str 22, Dex 13, Con -, Int 13, Wis 12, Cha 18
Skills: Listen +8, Sense Motive +8, Spot +8
Feats: Cleave, Endurance (B), Power Attack, Toughness (B), Exotic Weapon Proficiency (Dwarven Warchain) (B)
Environment: Any
Organization: Solitary or Pair
Challenge Rating: 6
Treasure: Double standard
Alignment: Always Lawful Good
Advancement: By Character Class
Level Adjustment: + 4

Dwur as Characters

- +6 Strength, +2 Wisdom, +4 Charisma. A dwur, being a construct, has no Constitution score.
- Medium size. This grants a dwur a bonus 20 hit points due to being a construct.
- A dwur's base land speed is 20 feet.
- Darkvision out to 120 feet.
- Racial Hit Dice: A dwur begins with four levels of construct, which provide 4d10 Hit Dice, a base attack bonus of +3, and base saving throw bonuses of Fort +1, Ref +1, and Will +1.
- Racial Skills: A dwur's construct levels give it skill points equal to 7 × (2 + Int modifier). Its class skills are Listen, Profession (any), Sense Motive, and Spot. Racial Feats: A dwur's four construct levels give it two feats.
- +6 natural armor bonus.
- Natural Weapons: Slam 1d6 + 1 ½ times Strength bonus.
- Special Qualities: Construct traits, dwarf traits, Damage reduction 5/adamantine, darkvision 120 ft, dwarf traits, fast healing 5, low light vision, will to flesh.
- Will to Flesh (Ex): A dwur may use his Charisma score (if positive) in place of Constitution for calculation of hit points, Fortitude saves and skill checks. Also, dwarven casters worshipping a dwarven god may heal dwur with curing spells as though the dwur were mortal.
- Dwur gain Endurance, Toughness and Exotic Weapon Proficiency (Dwarven Warchain) as bonus feats.
- Dwur are proficient in Heavy Armor and Shields as well as all martial weapons, and the dwarven warchain.
- Automatic Languages: Common, Dwarf, Celestial. Bonus Languages: Giant, Orc, Goblin
- Favored Class: Paladin.
- Level adjustment +4.

Blood of the Dwur]

Sometimes, the dwur, fascinated by their dwarven charges, will end up having affairs with young dwarven maidens or men. Such passionate relationships are short-lived as the dwur vanishes as quickly as he appeared, either leaving a pregnant dwarven woman or a child left at a young dwarf's doorstep a time later. The legacy of such a relationship is a child with dwur blood. These children often become paragons of faith even though they stand apart from their own

clans.

Mithril Soul

You discover you are a child of a dwarf and a dwur, either left with a clan at birth or raised by your dwarf mother. Such an unusual birth is not shunned but honored, although other dwarves always consider the child strange. He often follows the path of the paladin and is more open-minded than other dwarves.

Prerequisites: Dwarf
Benefit: your favored class is now Paladin and may freely multiclass back into Paladin should you take other classes. You must maintain your alignment restriction, however.

Way of Hammer and Hearth

You are a child of a dwarf and a dwur, one who possesses the skills of a peacemaker as well as a warrior. Languages come easily to you and other races find you to be very agreeable.

Prerequisites: Dwarf
Benefit: Speak Language and Diplomacy are considered class skills for you, and you gain a +1 racial bonus to Charisma skills when interacting with other races.

Sample Character: Ransha Hearthfire

"She was pretty as dwarves go, with a strong stance and dark eyes. Ransha smiled a lot, a simple smile for simple joys. She loved children, often producing candy for them while impacting some small wisdom. Some dwarves would question and argue with her, but she would always lower her voice the more they raised their voices. She was a young lady of peace and maidenly virtue.

"She was also a lady of mithril blood, a dwur, whose warchain cut 20 giants down and whose touch ensured that the Thane did not die the night the giants crushed his bones. She stayed to drive off the giants and to assure the dwarves were safe. When the Thane not asked but ordered her to stay to war against the elves, her eyes grew darker still. Her face hardened, her voice deepened and she seemed to grow in size with each word.

"'I am no instrument of war but a singer of peace. I play the song of salvation but not the bitter tune of hate. My music ends for you, Thane. You will play this march to needless war alone.'

"Ransha left the Thane to his war; his clan, saved by her before, was destroyed in a generation by senseless war."

- Thangrim Axwyrd, "The Fall of the Stoneheart Clan"

Ransha Hearthfire (CR 12)

Female dwur paladin 4/dwarven defender 4
LG Medium construct
Init +2
Senses: Darkvision 120' Listen +12 Spot +12
Languages Common, Dwarf, Celestial
AC: 33, touch 14, flat-footed 33
(+2 Dex, +10 armor, +3 shield, +6 natural, +2 dodge)
hp 168 (12 HD)
Resist: Immune to Critical Hits, DR 5/adamantine, Dwarf Traits, Construct Traits, Uncanny Dodge
Fort +18, **Ref** + 11, **Will** +15, +2 vs magic
Speed 30 ft. (6 squares), base speed 20 ft.

Melee: Holy Dwarven Warchain +20 (1d10+12/1d10+12+2d6 vs evil creatures)

Slam + 19(1d6+12)
Base Atk +11; Grp +19
Atk Options smite evil 1/day (+6 hit/+4 damage)
Special Actions lay on hands, remove disease, defensive stance 2/day, turn undead 9/day
Combat Gear Holy Dwarven Warchain +1, wand of cure light wounds (25 charges)
Paladin Spells Memorized (CL 2nd)

1st: Divine Favor

Abilities Str 26, Dex 15, Con -, Int 13, Wis 12, Cha 22
SQ Dwarven Defender, Fast Healing 5, Paladin Immunities
Feats: Cleave, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (Dwarven Warchain) (B), Power Attack, Endurance(B), Toughness (Bonus)
Skills Diplomacy +10 Knowledge (Religion) +5 Listen +12 Sense Motive +16 Spot +12
Possessions mithril full plate +2, animated heavy shield +1, belt of giant strength +4, boots of striding and springing, holy dwarven warchain +1, gloves of dexterity +2, cloak of charisma +2, wand of cure light wounds (25 charges), scroll of cure critical wounds

Sample Item: Dwarven Warchain

The dwarven warchain is a fearsome weapon that has fallen out of favor with dwarves. Still, it is a favored weapon of the dwur and the dwur use it to devastating effect. The dwarven warchain is a thick chain with a dwarven waraxe head on the end, swung out towards an enemy with devastating effect. The dwarven warchain is a two-handed reach weapon that may be used against adjacent targets and requires an Exotic Weapon Proficiency to wield.

Cost	Dmg (S)	Dmg (M)	Critical	Weight	Type
45gp	1d8	1d10	x3	15lbs	Slashing

Pet Shop of Wonders

for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Orion Gates

Almost everyone has owned a pet of some kind or another at some point in his or her life, whether it was a shaggy little puppy or a short-lived firefly-in-a-jar. Some people love their pets so much they'll spend more money on their cat than they do on themselves. In the interest of obsessive pet-lovers everywhere here are a few magic items for a new way to spend cash on Princess. The stats are made using **GURPS** *Fouth Edition,* and the costs are calculated as Slow and Sure Enchantment based on page 22 of *Magic.*

Pet Clothes

Tiny clothes for tiny people. Or in this case, tiny clothes for small, annoyed animals. However, with the application of judicious enchantment pet clothes can be used for far more than just embarrassing the hairiest member of your family. Most pet clothing also has the Adjustable Clothing enhancement (the cost is negligible compared to the full price and an owner may go through several pets in a lifetime). This often has the unintended side effect of making pet clothing usable by children or anyone close to the pet's size.

Sweater of Comfort: The most basic of magical pet clothing, this is a garish knit sweater designed to keep the animal comfortable in a variety of conditions. Because most pets are quite comfortable with their natural coats the sweaters are an extravagance usually commissioned only by the tastelessly wealthy or those who plan on dragging their animal companion through the harshest of environments. The sweater is reversible: one side a bright cherry red, the other is a more subdued blue color with little snowflakes picked out in white thread. When the red side is worn outward the pet is subjected to the Warmth spell. When the sweater is reversed the pet is subjected to the Coolness spell. Both enchantments have been made permanent through the use of the Power enchantment and the alternating effect is produced by the Link enchantment. *Cost:* $52,000

Scarf of Freshness: Pets are the source of a staggering variety of odors that can quickly permeate the owner's house. This scarf (available in a variety of garish and clashing colors) is used to solve just that problem. A combination of the Power Enchantment and the No-Odor spell keeps any pet wearing it blessedly stench-free. The tiny gold and silver pin used to hold the scarf in place is the true focus of the enchantment. *Cost:* $47,850

Hat of Grooming: This item takes the form of a "darling" cap, sized for a dog or cat. The hat is the focus of an always-on modified Haircut spell that keeps nails short, hair perfectly manicured in a pre-selected style and prevents the pet from shedding. A Hex spell means that the hat will not fall off no matter how determined the animal is to be rid of its embarrassing headgear. The Password for the Hex is usually the pet's name and is embroidered on the front of the hat so the owner cannot forget (the pet can't read it after all). It often includes a small, fuzzy bobble on the top of the hat. *Cost:* $21,450

Spaying Collar

Nothing is more embarrassing than when dear little Rex attempts to molest your guest's legs in the middle of dinner. Or even worse, when you find Princess in the closet surrounded by a pile of mewling little fur-balls. For those owners without the stomach for a more . . . organic solution, there is this enchanted collar. It uses a variant of the Strike Barren spell that not only makes the subject infertile but suppresses sexual urges and responses as well (animals react as though spayed or neutered). Removing the collar allows the owner to breed the pet when desired but suppress unwanted urges the rest of the time. *Cost:* $26,500

Doggie Door

A pet's freedom is important and many resent being cooped up inside all day, so many considerate owners install small flaps to allow their furry friends to enter and exit as they wish. However it takes only one clever gnome thief before the security flaws in such a design become obvious. The Doggy Door was created for owners who want their pets to have free reign of the outdoors but are too lazy to open a door (and have excess cash lying around). No flaps are installed at all; instead, the entire door is magically enchanted to be insubstantial to your pet. The door is enchanted with a Walk Through Wood spell, an exclusive Powerstone (4 energy points), and a Link enchantment that activates the door's magic when the pet approaches. The link is often actually keyed to a small charm or talisman on the pet's collar (which can be stolen by a particularly knowledgeable thief) and activates the spell for as long as the pet remains in the area. It takes a bit of training to get a pet used to this bizarre method of exit. Particularly dim pets may bump their heads attempting to run through other doors in the house. *Cost:* $33,425

Dog Flute

Expanding on the theory of the dog whistle, this instrument is the ultimate in pet obedience. It appears to be a short rune-carved ivory flute with four holes. Holding a finger over a hole and blowing will produce no audible noise, but will activate one of the flute's many enchantments. Despite its name many of the flute's abilities will function on any type of animal. Those abilities that affect specific animals are usually attuned to common domesticated animals such as dogs or cats.

First Note: This produces the effect of the spell Beast Soother.

Second Note: Blowing this note creates the effect of the spell Beast-Rouser

Third Note: Blowing a sustained note produces the effect of the Master spell . . . however the enchantment only lasts for as long as the user can keep blowing.

Fourth Note: The final note creates a Beast Summoning spell. Most of the time this is limited to one type of animal.

Some more potent flutes have a fifth effect: When all four holes are blocked and the flute is blown it creates the effect of a Control Animal spell. If the flute has a downside it is that the magic prevents it from ever being used as a normal instrument, no matter how much anyone blows into it no noise is produced. *Cost:* $ 75,900 (standard)

Pet-Golem

It is sad but true that many people cannot own the pet of their dreams. Due to allergies, environment, or just perpetual forgetfulness (regular feeding is important) it is impossible for them to have a tiny companion of their very own. Or perhaps they want a pet just not the biological by-products of pet-ownership. After all, cleaning up the litter box gets tiresome after a while.

The pet golem is a solution to all of these problems and more. In addition to being waste-free and needing no feeding it is effectively immortal, so the owner will never have to explain to the children why their beloved pet isn't going to be around anymore. The downside is that most (see below) pet-golems have the automaton meta-trait preventing them from behaving totally like real pets since they lack any sense of curiosity, playfulness, or any of the other charming instincts that make pets so lovable.

Pet-golems can be purchased with a variety of "packages" adding on to the basic pet golem. Most of these packages do not alter the pet's stats although many owners purchase larger "guard" pet-golems to provide protection.

Basic Package: This is a simple body of wood or clay, carved into the likeness of the animal desired. The level of craftsmanship can vary widely depending on the creator. For an additional charge of $75 a layer of real (or perhaps imitation) animal fur can be used to cover the golem to give a more life-like appearance. *Cost:* $ 4,290 or $5,082 for

the guard dog golem.

Illusion Shells: This feature involves built-in Illusionary Disguises of different levels, allowing customization of a pet-golem's appearance and a more realistic "pet simulation" experience. Simple, Complex, and Perfect illusions can all be imposed over the pet-golem. *Cost:* +$ 4,950 (simple); + $9,900 (complex); + $16,500

Pet-Intelligence: While Pet golems are actually more intelligent than average domesticated animals they lack many of the qualities that make animals so attractive to humans: a dog's cheerful loyalty and playfulness or a cat's aloofness and sense of grace. This package removes the Automaton, Cannot Learn, and Reprogrammable disadvantages from golem through the use of a variant of the Weapon Spirit spell, transferring the mind of an actual animal into the golem body. This is also a popular way to keep a dead pet "alive" for those who can afford it since it allows a pet's personality quirks to remain. Usually these golems have the full IQ of the pet (5 or so). *Cost:* Typically +$16,500 (also note change to golem point cost)

Dog Golem   *-148 points*

Attribute Modifiers: ST-3 [-30]; DX+1 [20]; IQ-4 [-80]; HT+4 [40].

Secondary Characteristics: SM \u20133; +5 HP [10]; +4 Per [20]; +2 Basic Move [10]

Advantages: Claws (blunt) [1]; Doesn't Breathe [20]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; Injury Tolerance (Homogenous, No Blood) [45]; Single-Minded [5];Teeth [1]; Unaging [15]; Unfazeable [15]; Vacuum Support [5].

Disadvantages: Automaton [-85]; Cannot Learn [-30]; Quadruped [-35]; Reprogrammable [-10]; Social Stigma (Valuable Property) [-10]; Unhealing (total)[-30]; Unnatural [-50]; Wealthy (Dead Broke) [-25].

Features: Does not have or spend Fatigue Points [0]

Skills: Dog Golems often come with no skills.

Cat Golem   *-125 points*

Attribute Modifiers: ST-5 [-50]; DX+3 [60]; IQ-4 [-80]; HT +4 [40].

Secondary Characteristics: SM \u20134; +7 HP [14]; +4 Per [10]; +1 Basic Move [5].

Advantages: Catfall [10]; Claws (sharp) [5]; Doesn't Breathe [20]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; Injury Tolerance (Homogenous, No Blood) [45];Single-Minded [5]; Teeth [1]; Unaging [15]; Unfazeable [15]; Vacuum Support [5].

Disadvantages: Automaton [-85]; Cannot Learn [-30]; Quadruped [-35]; Reprogrammable [-10]; Social Stigma (Valuable Property) [-10]; Unhealing (total) [-30]; Unnatural [-50]; Wealthy (Dead Broke) [-25].

Features: Does not have or spend Fatigue Points [0].

Skills: Cat Golems often come with no skills.

Guard Dog Golem   *-56 points*

Attribute Modifiers: ST +3 [30]; DX+1 [20]; IQ-4 [-80]; HT+4 [40].

Secondary Characteristics: SM -1; +4 HP [8]; +6 Per [30]; +2 Basic Move [10]

Advantages: Claws (sharp) [5]; Damage Resistance 4 [20]; Doesn't Breathe [20]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; Injury Tolerance (Homogenous, No Blood) [45]; Single-Minded [5]; Teeth [1]; Unaging [15]; Unfazeable [15]; Vacuum Support [5].

Disadvantages: Automaton [-85]; Cannot Learn [-30]; Quadruped [-35]; Reprogrammable [-10]; Social Stigma (Valuable Property) [-10]; Unhealing (total) [-30]; Unnatural [-50]; Wealthy (Dead Broke) [-25].

Features: Does not have or spend Fatigue Points [0]

Skills: Guard Dog Golems usually have 8 points of skills, mostly in Brawling and other useful skills.

Deluxe Dog House

This is truly the ultimate extravagance for any wealthy pet owner. The Dog House is the perfect, magical home for any pet (dog or otherwise) at a cost slightly less than constructing a large mansion. The appearance of the Dog House is decided by the owner and can be as elegant as his or her budget allows, but there are those who take a perverse pleasure in knowing that the crude collection of boards in their backyard actually costs more money than most people will ever see. The house has several features:

Expansive: The house is much bigger inside than outside. The exterior is usually no more than 10 to 20 cubic feet with an entrance large enough to allow the animal inside. The interior is much bigger: 1000 cubic feet. The ceiling is sized for pets but big enough that a person can get inside if need be (5'). This is done using the Hideaway enchantment.

Hygienic: Anywhere a pet stays long enough tends to begin to smell pretty strongly and eventually they'll need to answer the call of nature. Fortunately the house is equipped for such necessities. A No-Smell spell keeps odors at bay, and a constant, high-powered Clean (three-yard radius) spell eliminates shedding and natural waste. It also cleans anything outside of the pet's food bowls. Dirt and grime tracked inside is handily removed as well.

Self-Sufficient: The house provides the pet with a constant supply of food and fresh water. Large, ivory bowls inside the house are kept constantly full (never to overflowing) and are replaced as soon as the pet eats. The "standard" set up is a combination of Create Water, Create Food (four meals a day total), and Season (to add flavor). Each spell has a Link to prevent it from overflowing the bowls. Owners worried about their pet's health or appearance may opt for less 'meals per day' from the Create Food spell.

Opulent: The interior of the house is often richly decorated and even carpeted. Decorations can be whatever the owner desires and are kept clean by the constant Clean spell in operation. Delicate objects are not recommended unless extra money is spent to provide Repair or Toughen spells. The price of decorations is not included in the final cost since it is mostly mundane.

Additional Features: The pet is cared for and kept fed, but it must be kept comfortable as well. The interior of the house is lit by a permanent Continual Light spell (of torch strength) modified by a Link spell that shuts the light off during the night. The interior of the house is also kept warm (or cool) by a set of Linked Warm and Cool spells which operate to raise or lower the temperature towards a comfortable 72 degrees. The temperature can only be altered by 40 degrees.

Obviously no one would buy the Deluxe Dog House for practicality, but if they were to make a purchase it would cost $ 8,913,600 plus any expenses for decoration (and the price of a pet to live in luxury). All spells that require it are sustained by the Power spell.

Champ

To outward appearances "Champ" is a Finely crafted thrusting broadsword. The blade has the inscription "Champ" just above the handle. The pommel design is unusual, it is in the shape of a bloodhound with its mouth open and tongue

lolling out. Beyond these unusual decorations the weapon is a quality piece of work.

History: Champ's life started as a loyal and very shaggy bloodhound owned by the famous huntsman Lenard Gerdes. For years Gerdes and Champ battled poachers, bandits, orcish invaders, and the occasional plump pheasant. Unfortunately, like so many loyal pets, Champ died well before his master. Old age's slowness and a pair of orcish arrows brought Champ down. Rather than journey without his loyal companion Lenard chose to keep him by his side. Calling in several old favors and using most of his savings Lenard was able to secure a new "home" for Champ and a powerful weapon for himself. Champ's spirit was bound into a custom forged blade that Lenard keeps near at all times.

Powers: Champ's mind and soul are bound to the weapon by the Weapon Spirit spell. The spell grants the blade an IQ of 5 and the ability to 'speak' or at least to bark, whine, howl, and growl. Champ also retains the following advantages and disadvantages: Higher Purpose (aiding his master), Intolerance (orcs and other "beastial" humanoids), and the 5-point version of Chummy.

Champ also possesses the Track skill of 14 (Per +4). Although he no longer has a sense of smell he is able to "catch the scent" of his prey another way. Against any subject whose blood is on his blade, although he need not have drawn the blood himself it must be relatively fresh. This allows him to track and sense the subject as though he had Discriminatory Smell (including the +4 bonus to track). Champ still loves the hunt and will enthusiastically track anyone his master wishes.

Finally, the blade Champ calls home now is enhanced in several ways. First it has the Loyal Weapon enchantment, a +1 enhancement to both skill rolls and damage from Accuracy and Puissance. To ensure that he never loses his companion a second time Gerdes also had Shatterproof used on the blade. Unlike most Loyal Weapons Champ only returns to the hand of a master he likes (at least a Good reaction roll) and his loyalty cannot be transfered simply by selling the weapon. He may also be commanded to "stay" by his master. Should his preferred master not be present he may allow himself to be weilded by another individual he likes but will immediately return to the side of the master who had the highest reaction roll when possible (Gerdes obviously trumps any other wielder).

Hooks: These are a few possible adventure hooks that could lead players to an encounter with Champ.

- If Gerdes is still alive but somehow impossible for Champ to reach he may attempt to get help from others. He cannot move except to return to his master, or he might be immobilized already, but the sound of barks, growls and howling might draw the players to its location where he will immediately attempt to get their help for his master. Since Champ can't actually speak this may lead to a "Lassie" moment ("what's that boy? Timmy fell down the well?").
- The PCs are drawn to the scene of a battle by mournful baying howls. When they arrive there is no animal to be found just a dead man (and quite a few foes) and a strange blade at his side. After the death of his master Champ may not be in the mood for new companionship (penalty to the initial reaction roll) however, finding and slaying those who killed his last owner may improve his disposition immensely.
- The PCs may find themselves on the wrong end of Champ. After escaping a skirmish with a man with an odd, growling sword they find that man chasing after them endlessly. Champ's tracking ability is excellent (skill of 18 when tracking by blood) and is hard to prevent. Champ's owner would make a nearly inescapable foe.
- In a less serious campaign the PC's might find Champ a hard weapon to get rid of. Should he roll particularly high on a reaction for a new weilder he may refuse to leave his or her side . . . no matter how much they attempt to get ride of him. While Champ is a useful weapon he can also be an inconvenient one: barking or howling when stealth is needed, trying to sleep at his master's feet without a sheath, growling at those he doesn't like, and so on. Getting Champ to leave the player alone may be an adventure in itself.

Weapon	Damage	Reach	Parry	Weight	ST
Champ	sw+3 cut	1	0	3	10
	Thr+4 imp	1	0	-	10

Pyramid Review

Catan Event Cards (for Settlers of Catan)

Published by Mayfair Games

Designed by Klaus Teuber

Art by Tanja Donner

44 cards (36 event cards, six scorekeeping cards, one New Year card, & one rules card); full color; $5

Something's brewing in the idyllic land of Catan. Several somethings, in fact. The people there are used to a regular rotation of seasons, shearing the sheep here and chopping down the wood there, with the occasional cutthroat invader nipping off with their wheat. All of a sudden, though, things seem to be happening every tur . . . uhm . . . throughout the year. *Catan Event Cards* have arrived to liven up their days.

The cards in this set, first and foremost, supplant the dice in regular *Settlers of Catan* games. You no longer roll for the robber or resource production; instead you draw a card each turn and use the number printed thereon. Before you do that, however, you have to resolve the event. Each card has some occurrence listed on it. Most of them are non-events, telling you your workers toiled away and you receive your resources as usual. Since you've lost the die mechanic, the robber is listed on a number of them as well, and he steals cards, cleans out anyone flush with resources, and blocks additional production as normal.

The rest of the set has something else. The robber, for a start, may simply flee back to the desert with his tail between his legs (something he didn't do in the basic game). It's a mix of good and bad, and some give one player an advantage over the others. For example, the Epidemic reduces resources for your cities . . . they only collect goods as if they were settlements. The wealthy might have to give trade goods to the less fortunate players, or those with harbors may benefit from Calm Seas.

And oh, are you going to get sick of repairing your roads after the Earthquake. Worse than living on the coast. Since the numbers that come up on the cards are a constant, a New Year card is placed just near the bottom of the deck each time. When drawn, the whole thing is reshuffled without the last five cards being seen; this prevents anyone from counting cards and knowing what results to expect as the stack dwindles. The cards available mean you'll be reshuffling them about once every eight rounds in a four-player game.

The victory conditions remain the same (and for the *Cities & Knights* supplement you still roll the event die in addition to using these).

The card quality is awful. They feel like flattened slugs. These are the mushiest, floppiest items in recent memory, and the only thing that permits is easier shuffling. Since you do this often enough, something sturdier would have been better. It may keep the company costs down, but if you have to purchase this deck again every time one of your pieces bends, it's not going to do your pocketbook any good. The graphics on the cards they include for tracking your victory points (see below) are small, so when they say to use something like coins to track your total, they mean use dimes (or foreign currency, if they have anything smaller). Any other coin may cover two spaces. Everything else about the graphic quality is fine -- small but clear text, good headers (though having every one against a stark red background makes you think you've drawn something horrible), and colorful art (they've moved to a more dynamic style compared to the almost woodcut-like pieces from the original set).

If you're willing to play with "open" winning conditions, the set has six cards that let you track your victory points on a meter using beads or some knickknack. These come in the appropriate colors, but they're a pretty weak add-on unless you've got a heavy token with a small base that won't move much (and no one can field, say, paper and pencil).

The wisdom of bringing the *Catan Event Cards* to your table depends on the disposition of your play group. If playing the base game seems a little too staid or predictable, it's an excellent way to shake things up (it's certainly the right price for doing so). There's a fancy thrill to pulling from the pile that the dice simply don't offer, and it's just the right amount of not-so-fast-fellah to prevent dependable plays. If you already get too giddy worrying that the robber is going to pop up, you might want to stick with the old standby. It's not that there's too much going on here or that the results they offer are so onerous, but the deck does keep you on your toes and the perfect hand is less likely to survive a round from all the "give a card up" and "trade a card away" that comes up. Purists may find added considerations like "Will I be forced to take more cards than I planned, and suffer from the robber?" provide too much randomness.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

True20 Adventure Roleplaying

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Designed by Steve Kenson with Matthew E. Kaiser

"Caliphate Nights" Designed by Aaron Infante-Levy

"Lux Aeternum" Designed by Dave Mattingly, Aaron Sulivan, & Ryan Wolfe

"Mecha vs. Kaiju" Designed by Jonathan Wright

"Borrowed Time" Designed by Bruce Baugh & David Bolack

Cover by Ozan Art

Illustrated by Ilya Astrakhan, Toren "Macbin" Atkinson, Drew Baker, Balaskas, Empty Room Studios (Michael Hammlet), Kent Burles, Caleb Cleveland, Paul Daly, A. Bleys Ingram, Jonathan Kirtz, Leo Lingas, Britt Martin, James Ryman, Mike Vilardi, & Lisa Wood

Cartography by Paul Daly & Ryan Wolfe

226-page b&w hardcover; $34.95

The origins of Green Ronin's *True20 Adventure Roleplaying* lie in the publisher's award winning *[Blue Rose: The Roleplaying Game of Romantic Fantasy](#)* whose mechanics gamers began using in other more traditional roleplaying settings, such as *Star Wars* or *The Lord of the Rings.* Although the origins of the *Blue Rose* mechanics clearly lay in the *d20 System,* their lighter, smoother style of play deemphasized the *d20 System's* tactical elements and added more modern elements that encouraged roleplaying.

True20 Adventure Roleplaying offers all of that and more. It has been developed into a relatively low-powered generic class-and-level roleplaying game intended to cover a variety of game styles and genres. This is seen in the four "Worlds of Adventure" included in this book, and a further five to be found in the supplement, *True20 Worlds of Adventure.* Eight of these nine settings are winners of Green Ronin's "*True20* Setting Search," which called for other publishers to submit settings that would showcase the *True20* system. Certainly what the four display is the mechanical ease with which the *True20* system can be added to without the tinkering that the *d20 System* would require, as well as *True20's* versatility.

A *True20* character still has the same attributes as the *d20 System,* but essentially only the attribute bonuses matter. So instead of the usual 3 to 18 scale, True20 uses -5 to +5. Instead of race, a character has a Background, which provides

attribute modifiers, free feats and skills, and favored feats and skills. The Backgrounds given cover the six standard fantasy races, also serving as models for more.

Instead of Alignment, a character has his Nature, consisting of a virtue and a vice. In a fashion similar to *[The World of Darkness Storytelling System Rulebook,](#)* these are not just roleplaying and story hooks, but also a means of regaining Conviction. Similar to luck or action points, Conviction is spent to re-roll any die, activate a class ability, ease a task, gain an extra action or move, and to recover from damage. A first level character begins with three Conviction points, the maximum he can have increasing every other level.

True20 replaces the *d20 System's* multitude of character classes with just three. Each provides skills and feats, a core ability powered by Conviction, and is designed to emulate various archetypes. The Adept can use supernatural powers like Fire Shaping or Teleport, modeling magicians or psychics. He spends Conviction to temporarily use a supernatural power he does not have. The Expert possesses more skills than the other classes, and could be anything from an adventuring scholar to a rogue. He spends Conviction to temporarily gain extra skill ranks. The Warrior is the least complex class, beginning the game with either weapons or firearms training. He spends Conviction to erase any light damage taken. Although a character is free to multi-class, he can never change the core ability gained at first level.

Feats work as expected, many being specific to each class. A character has more of them than in the *d20 System,* gaining another at each level. The selection and greater number available gives a player wider choice in designing his character. Plus it is easy to gain those from another class by taking a level in it. Even so, this feels restrictive compared to generic RPGs.

Skills are slightly different in that initially each rank is equal to maximum possible at a character's level. Thus at first level, all of a character's skill ranks will be 4. Only at later levels can any skills ranks vary from this. There are no restrictions upon what skills a character can have.

Broad in scope, *True20's* treatment of skills raises some minor issues. First, with only a few skills available, the choice can easily be exhausted, especially for the Expert class. This becomes more obvious for characters with higher Intelligence as this increases the number known. Second, because there is relatively little variation in skill ranks, the only way to really improve a character's skills is by possessing a high Intelligence or feats such as Skill Focus. In this *True20* favors feats and attributes slightly more than skills.

The Adept class can opt to choose a supernatural power instead of a feat. There is a diverse selection of powers given, modeling spell or psionic like effects. All are relatively low powered, and all can be used as often as a character wants. The only downside is that some require intense concentration or are fatiguing. Using such a power too often and failing a fatigue check will affect the Adept physically.

Mechanically, *True20* is essentially the same as the *d20 System* -- roll the die, applying any attribute, skill, and situation modifiers to beat a difficulty target. Where it is different, is that it uses only the 20-sided die and none other. The rules cover both undertaking a routine task without rolling and making it more difficult to do it with panache. Combat is also different. Instead of Armor Class, a character has a Defense Bonus, which is different if a character parries using his Strength or dodges using his Dexterity. Instead of Hit Points, a character saves against the damage hoping to reduce or ignore its effects. Armor adds to this saving roll, whilst all weapons do a set amount of damage. Any damage done, lethal or non-lethal, will affect a character directly with various penalties.

Like weapons, equipment is treated in a generic fashion and purchased using an abstract wealth mechanic. The bestiary includes many of the *d20 System* standards, plus oddities like the Blood Pudding and the Bear-Shark. Advice for the Narrator is short and pertinent, the most notable aspect being the game's method of handling advancement. *True20* eschews experience points, instead having the Narrator decide when a character acquires a new level.

As written, *True20 Adventure Roleplaying* feels like a generic fantasy game, whether classic fantasy or space opera. Can it do horror? Or superheroes? The latter is doubtful, the former probable, but not direct from the book. So the Narrator will need to develop this *True20* genre himself. Yet there is no advice to help the Narrator develop this or any other setting. For these reasons it is not truly flexible or generic.

Fortunately, the four "Worlds of Adventure" showcase what *True20* can do. The first is Paradigm Concepts' "Caliphate Nights," an Arabian Adventure setting inspired by *One Thousand and One Nights* more than Hollywood and set during the Golden Age of Islam. It includes everything needed to play, including scenario hooks, archetype descriptions, feats, and background details. Players are encouraged to emulate the storytelling tradition, spending Conviction to tell and narrate short in-game tales to influence and inform the main game. Alternatively, Weaving can influence smaller situations, but the outcome can go against the player just as it can help him. The accompanying Narrator advice is excellent, and overall, "Caliphate Nights" is elegantly exact, though leaving you wanting more.

BlackWyrm Games' "Lux Aeturnum" mixes sci-fi and fantasy, complete with aliens, androids, space pirates, musketeers, mystic powers, ancient aliens, and various historical elements all exiled to a distant space sector. This does not read as well, and needs both more space and development.

"Mecha vs. Kaiju" from Big Finger Games does exactly what it suggests, sending young anime archetypes forward to defend Japan from giant monsters. With a plot involving North Korean espionage, this setting is played at two scales, normal and aboard the huge Mecha, which are controlled through various feats. With just three mecha and three kaiju types, this setting again needs more, though not to the same extent.

Finally, Electric Mulch offers not so much a setting but a feat package that can be added to any setting. With "Borrowed Time" the idea is that time can be manipulated on a micro scale, a character making small eddies within the river of time to gain extra actions, bonuses, or even freeze an enemy. Also given are several factions fighting a secret war for control of time. Cinematic in feel *Matrix*-style, "Borrowed Time" places an emphasis upon looking good and brand name recognition.

Clearly the best of the quartet, "Caliphate Nights," pushes the *True20* system in a more modern narrative direction, while serving as a good model for any setting. Of the other three, "Lux Aeturnum" interestingly reorganizes the supernatural powers along disciplines, while "Mecha vs. Kaiju" and "Borrowed Time" add a raft of interesting feats. "Borrowed Time" manages to be cooler and more interesting than the other two.

True20 Adventure Roleplaying is not quite the broad game it wants to be. Not wholly flexible nor fully generic, it is still hampered by limitations upon character and the insufficient advice on moving the mechanics out of the default fantasy and sci-fi genres. Only in the four settings are the rules allowed to blossom and then only one is a prize bloom. However, they do show that the *True20* system is more easily adaptive than its ancestor, the *d20 System.* Plus *True20 Adventure Roleplaying* offers a more streamlined, easier, less cluttered gaming experience.

--Matthew Pook

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

More Game, More Toys, More Knowledge (Part II)

How many times has this happened to you in your games (on either side of the equation as a player or a GM)?

The players are having a good time, but they haven't been entirely focused. Perhaps they've been cracking jokes, or getting involved in tangents, or other activities that have been enjoyable for all involved (the whole point of getting together for games, in my opinion), but the actual pace of the adventure has not been what the GM envisioned.

After a while the GM takes a glance at the clock and realizes, to his horror, that he only has about 30 minutes left, and four scenes before the adventure ends (one more information gathering session, a minor skirmish that will affect the final outcome, a moral dilemma, and the big climactic fight).

The gears of the GM's mind start spinning: What to do? He might be able to get some more time from the players, but he knows half the group needs to get up early in the morning for Something Important, so he probably can't eke too many more minutes out of them. He might be able to cut one or two of the scenes, but which ones? They all build on each other, and it might take away from the players' accomplishments if the GM just automatically adjudicates what happens in those scenes, regardless if it's with a "You win!" or "You lose!" decision. The GM might be able to lock himself in the bathroom and cobble together a solution, but it would subtract valuable minutes away from the quickly fleeting session. He might be able to just end the game now, but the session hasn't had much of an "up" beat to end on, and he knows that everyone would probably be vaguely dissatisfied with the whole (even if they've been enjoying the parts).

What to do?

Digression: In my writing class back in my college days (days which speed ever more swiftly into the past, like a missed school bus controlled by a vengeful driver), people would often bring in short stories and ask, "How can I fix the ending?" And Dr. Taylor, who I believe was quoting someone else, would sometimes say, "The problem with the last page is often in the first page." In other words, it's not merely enough to tweak the last few paragraphs or two, but it instead may be necessary to rework the piece from an earlier point; perhaps even the premise itself is flawed. While this advice has scads of implications in the gaming world, today I'm using this idea to illustrate our 30-minues-left scenario from above.

In this case, the need to solve the problem of running out of time actually has its roots much earlier in the session. And this problem exists because, while the players know how much time is left, they don't know how much *adventure* is left. The situation is similar to an oddly paced suspense/dramatic movie, where, 90 minutes in, you decide you really need to use the restroom, only to discover upon your return that you missed the bit where it's revealed that Kaiser Soze is a transvestite sled. Well, if you'd known that the movie was going to get interesting, you wouldn't have gone at that point, right?

Two weeks ago, in [Part I](#) of this installment (Hah! I bet you thought I'd forgotten about Part I!), I was going to propose a possible solution to the problems presented there. I should stress that this solution has not been tried yet (at least by me . . . someone else out there may have developed this independently).

What if, before game starts, players were presented with a checklist? In computer games, novels, movies, and many other forms of entertainment, the audience has some idea about where in the greater whole it is at any given point (how many pages are left, how close it's been to two hours, and so on). Even audiences in other (non-roleplaying) games have a sense about the pace. In a game of **Munchkin,** for example, once a few players get to level 9, you know the game's probably going to end soon. But this isn't the case with RPGs; you might know how much time exists to play, but that doesn't have any more relation to how much *game* is left than deciding you're going to read for an hour means you're going to have a satisfying experience. On the other hand, knowing that you're going to read until the next chapter break *should* help ensure that the experience is more satisfying (presuming the writer knows what he's doing).

But let's interrupt this pontificating with a worked example of what I envision (in this case, a *Star Trek* adventure):

Adventure: "If This Be Method, There Is Madness To It"

Three-act adventure designed for one evening

- ___ **Introduction (Opening Script)**
- ___ **Act I**
    - ___ Scene I (Interaction, Investigation)
    - ___ Scene II (Minor combat) [Optional]
    - ___ Scene III (Interaction, Problem solving)
- ___ **Act II**
    - ___ Scene I (Interaction, Significant combat)
    - [Note: Scenes II to IV are optional, and the order may vary, although at least one of them should occur]
    - ___ Scene II (Exploration, Investigation)
    - ___ Scene III (Problem solving)
    - ___ Scene IV (Interaction, possible significant combat)
    - ___ Scene V (Interaction)
- ___ **Act III**
    - ___ Scene I (Major combat)
    - ___ Scene II (Problem solving) [optional]
    - ___ Scene III (Interaction) [Optional]
- ___ **Resolution**
    - ___ Final Scenes (Optional)
        - ___ Player A
        - ___ Player B
        - ___ Player C
- ___ Experience, Wrap-Up (Optional)

I envision this checklist being on a publicly viewable spot -- say, a dry-erase board or one of those big pads of paper on an easel. (I'd probably also mark off a section of the upper-left corner with something like "Left Field" and make random checkmarks in that region whenever the players were off on tangents.)

And then, true to its name, I'd check off relevant sections as they were accomplished (or cross them off if they became moot), as the adventure continued. In this way, the entire gaming group knows where they stand in the larger whole; if there's an hour left of game time and one-and-a-half acts, then the players (and GM) are all on the same page about what sort of effort will be required to keep the game on track. (And if they're on the last scene with 30 minutes left, they know they can drag out their roleplaying for quite a while without worrying that the GM is going to spring a last-minute plot development.)

This checklist system can be modified depending on how much or how little information the GM wants to give the players. For example, it would be easy to add a mood "theme" to each scene (such as "Generally optimistic," "neutral," "tense") so that players who endure a particularly depressing or disruptive scene know how long they need to "hang in there" before they get some relief. (This can help avoid a scene similar to the "We Need To Talk . . .") The GM might even provide information related to how he gauges the danger level (such as "10% chance of success, 75% chance of survival"), perhaps going so far as to give the point totals or challenge ratings of the threats in question. This can help players realize that they may not be expected to win a challenge

Why Tell?

Some might be asking why information about the type of encounter is given in the sample checklist. My gaming groups usually consist of players with varying types of

(as per my earlier column "Appropriate Challenges? Hah!") or, conversely, when they're expected to pull out all the stops and rely on resources they might not normally (eliminating the quirk discussed two weeks ago about players conserving their stuff even when perhaps they should be using it).

Of course, this technique isn't without drawbacks. First, it's only suitable for certain kinds of campaigns: Those with a strong dramatic pull (in other words, there's an overarching storyline that encourages the players to stay on track) and/or adventures with a closed environment (such as a dungeon crawl). In the case of the latter, such a checklist could literally be analogous to some computer games, with "checkpoints" as milestones are reached: "Level cleared!"

Second, many GMs (and more than a few players) likely don't want their fun spoiled with meta-knowledge of the adventure; they feel that knowing, say, an information-gathering scene is coming up might take away from some of the surprise. However, if the labels are broad enough, there's nothing to keep the GM from mixing up what those labels mean: For example, let's say the players know an "Interaction" scene that leads into a "Combat" scene. Does that mean the person they're interacting with is going to attack them? Does it mean the person they're talking to is going to direct them to their next battle? Does it mean the heroes are going to be attacked as they step out of the bar they're talking to the person? Really, even knowing *what* is going to happen doesn't necessarily mean they'll know *how* it's going to happen.

interests; in campaigns past I've had success telegraphing to, say, a combat fan that -- though these are pretty talky sections of the adventure now -- in a bit there should be something more interesting to him. This merely codifies that tendency, (hopefully) helping to ensure that no players tune out completely. It should also help with bathroom breaks or the like; if this scene is only listed as an investigative one, then the player of the character who's really bad at investigation can go and get a snack without feeling he's going to miss something.

As I said before, I haven't tried this technique yet. There may well be hidden pitfalls to using checklists. But I'll almost certainly try it at the next convention I'm a guest at, and it may well find its way into my regular gaming sessions. Hopefully my players will check it out.

--Steven Marsh

Naval Warriors: The Officers And Men Who Fought The Great Square-Riggers

Part I: The Men
for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Nicholas Lovell

"Mr Caldicote, I would be much obliged if you would assemble the men by divisions."

"Aye, aye, sir." Caldicote touched the brim of his bicorne hat and called in a voice that could reach the foretop even in a double-reef storm. "All hands! All hands!"

The bosun's whistle carried the message throughout the ship. Men tumbled up from below in freshly-washed clothes, their queues plaited and retied at the nape of their necks. Within a few moments, the disordered chaos dissolved into disciplined rows as six hundred men placed their feet along the deck seams.

"Toe the line, there, toe the line!"

The starboard and larboard watches stood on either side of the waist, the idlers behind them, while the warrant and commissioned officers clustered on the quarterdeck.

Caldicote touched the brim of his hat again. "The crew is assembled for your inspection, sir."

* * *

The naval vessels of the 18th and 19th centuries required enormous manpower. The only source of energy for adjusting the sails, loading the guns, and undertaking the myriad tasks required to maintain a ship in peak fighting condition was the muscle power of the crew. A ship of the line could carry up to 800 men including marines, working as a cohesive unit to explore the globe, protect trade and confound the enemy.

This series of articles will look at the men who constituted these crews, and give ideas of how to create them in *GURPS* terms.

Roles and Rankings

The sailors were divided into four grades, based on their expertise and experience at sea.

Able Seamen (AB): Could "hand, reef and steer," meaning they understood the duties of a sailor, could be trusted to reduce the sails in heavy weather and could take a spell at the wheel of a large ship. They were in fact highly skilled, with a particular awareness of rope-handling.

Ordinary seamen: Competent, but less capable of independent action than the able seamen and typically with less than two years at sea.

Landsmen: Essentially incompetent as sailors, were used mainly for heaving on ropes or the capstan.

Boys: less strong than the landsmen, they were used as messengers or to carry powder to the great guns.

The seamen could also be distinguished by the roles that they played in the ship. This was not a formal title, but it

reflected their usual tasks on board ship.

Topmen tended to be young and nimble. Their role was to climb the masts, crawl out along the yardarms and release or gather the sails. They were required to do this in all weathers, rain, ice or snow, climbing masts that could reach up to 200 feet in the sky, and which rolled in enormous, dizzying circles as the ship pitched through the waves.

Forecastlemen and members of the afterguard were older, experienced sailors. They remained on deck, adjusting the sheets, halyards, braces, and other ropes that controlled the set of the sails. Waisters tended to be landsmen, working in the waist of the ship (in the middle), pulling on ropes, manning the capstan, and other manual tasks. These three groups were also the primary members of the gun crews.

Idlers were seamen with special expertise that did not require them to handle the sails or the great guns. This included the cook and his mates, the carpenter's mates, the sailmaker's mates and the cooper's mates. Unlike the topmen and forecastlemen, they were able to get uninterrupted sleep on most nights as they were not required to keep watch.

The topmen, waisters, forecastlemen and afterguard were divided into two "watches," called starboard and larboard (larboard has been called port by most sailors since 1844). The day was also divided into seven "watches":

Noon to 4pm: the afternoon watch
4pm to 6pm: the first dog watch
6pm to 8pm: the second dog watch
8pm to midnight: the first night watch
Midnight to 4am: the middle watch
4am to 8am: the morning watch
8am to noon: the forenoon watch

The men assigned to either the larboard or the starboard watch would be on duty for each watch, meaning that for example, in the evening, one would be on duty for the first night watch until midnight, then sleep for four hours until 4am when they were back on duty for the morning watch. The following day, the roles would be reversed.

When the ship was in action, all hands were called. Aside from men dedicated to sail handling, any of the hands might work the cannons, which had to be sponged, reloaded and run out again after each shot, and required up to eight men to handle. Similarly, if the captain managed to bring his ship alongside an enemy vessel, any crew member might be expected to board the enemy and engage in hand-to-hand fighting.

Recruitment

Sailors were recruited in many ways. The Royal Navy found such difficulty in maintaining its manpower levels that it relied heavily on impressment. Any able-bodied man within 50 miles of the sea was at risk of being forcibly taken on board ship, unless he had a certificate granting him immunity. Once on board ship, he was immediately subject to the taut discipline of the Royal Navy, and faced execution for desertion. Other sources of crew included volunteers, recruitment drives in market towns, and petty criminals who chose naval service ahead of jail or transportation.

The American navy mainly used volunteers, and crews frequently included men who had deserted from other navies. In 1807, for example, *HMS Leopard* fired seven broadsides into the unprepared US frigate *Chesapeake* and boarded her to recover four deserters (three of whom were American citizens who had previously been impressed by the Royal Navy.)

Many seamen had skills from their former lives before they were pressed. It was not unusual to find farmers, smiths, carpenters, ostlers and teamsters in a crew.

Characteristics

The fighting sailors of the navies of the age of sail were unwashed, aggressive, tight-knit, frequently hidebound and highly superstitious. In the capricious world of wide oceans and lee shores, sailors believed that you could whistle for the wind, that any number of talismans brought good luck, and that there were such things as "Jonah's" -- men who brought ill-fortune on a vessel.

But they were also generous, gregarious, competent and easy-going. Living in such close confines with so many men, fitting-in was a skill learned quickly and well.

Physically, sailors were typically short. A survey of men on board *HMS Bellerephon* in the early 19th century showed that the average height was 5'5," no crew member was over 6', and there were several men who were shorter than 5'. They were often fit and nimble, but the physical ravages of years at sea and battles with the enemy were common.

Templates

Ordinary Seaman   *90 points*

You are a sailor who knows the basics but has been at sea for less than two years.

Attributes: **ST** 12 [20]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 13 [30].

Secondary characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 12 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0]; FP 13 [0]; Basic speed 6.25 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages: Languages (One accented or two broken, both spoken only) [2], Patron 5 (major nation, 9 or less) [30].

Disadvantages: Code of Honour (Sailor's) [-5]; Duty (extremely hazardous, 12 or less) [-15]; Enemy (utterly formidable group, 9 or less) [-40], Illiterate [-3].

Skills: Boating (Unpowered) DX-1 [1]-11; Brawling DX+1 [2]-13; Broadsword DX-1 [1]-11; Carousing HT+0 [1]-13; Climbing DX-1 [1]-11; Gunner (Cannon) DX+0 [1]-12; Guns (Pistol) DX+0 [1]-12; Hobby skill (Whittling, Scrimshaw, Hornpipe dancing, etc) DX+0 [1]-12; Knot-tying DX+0 [1]-12; Seamanship IQ+0 [1]-11.

Optional Advantages, Skills, and Disadvantages

Choose 15 points of advantages and skills and -15 points of disadvantages from the following list. Many of the skills are more suited for landsmen, and reflect the historical truth that many sailors were pressed from land-based jobs.

Advantages: Acute Hearing/Eyesight [2*]; Appearance: Attractive [4]; Absolute Direction [5]; Ambidexterity [5]; Catfall [10]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Cultural Familiarity [1 per culture]; Fit [5] or Very Fit [15]; High Pain Threshold [10] Languages (spoken only): Native [3], Accented [2], Broken [1]; Literacy (Native) [3]; Night Vision [1*]; Perfect Balance (15).

Skills [2 points in each]: Animal Handling-11 (IQ+0); Area Knowledge-12 (IQ+1); Axe/Mace-12 (DX+0); Carpentry-12 (IQ+1); Cooking-11 (IQ+0); Farming-11 (IQ+0); Filch-12 (DX+0); Fishing-12 (Per+1); Fortune Telling (Palmistry)-11 (IQ+0); Gambling-11 (IQ+0); Guns (Musket)-13 (DX+1); Leatherworking-13 (DX+1); Lockpicking-11 (IQ+0); Musical Instrument-10 (IQ-1); Packing-11 (IQ+0); Search-11 (Per+0); Singing-14 (HT+1); Smith-11 (IQ+0); Smuggling-11 (IQ+0); Swimming-14 (HT+1); Teamster-11 (IQ+0); Weather Sense-11 (IQ+0).

Disadvantages: Alcoholism [-15]; Appearance: Unattractive [-4] or Ugly[-8]; Bad Temper [-10]; Berserk [-10*]; Bully [-10]; Chronic Pain (Mild) [-5]; Chummy [-5]; Compulsive Gambling [-5*]; Gullibility [-10*]; Hard of Hearing [-15]; Hidebound [-5]; Innumerate [-5]; Lecherousness [-15]; Missing Digit [-2]; Missing thumb [-5]; One Eye [-15].

Able Seaman   *105 points*

You are an experienced sailor with at least two years experience at sea.

As Ordinary Seaman above, but with the following changes:

Skills: Boating (Sailboat) DX+0 [2]-12; Boating (Unpowered) DX+0 [2]-12; Broadsword DX+1 [4]-13; Carousing HT+0 [1]-13; Climbing DX+0 [2]-12; Gunner (Cannon) DX+2 [4]-14; Guns (Pistol) DX+1 [2]-13; Knot-tying DX+1 [2]-13; Seamanship IQ+2 [4]-13.

Optional Advantages, Skills, and Disadvantages

Choose a total of 20 points of advantages and skills and -20 points of disadvantages from the Ordinary Seaman list.

Sample Character

James Johnstone grew up on a farm near Winchester in Hampshire. He demonstrated an ability to work with the draft horses and pack animals at an early age, and before long took responsibility for taking the family's goods to market. James was bored at home, and frequently took the excuse of the weekly visit to Winchester to spend the evening in a tavern, laughing, talking and gambling (mainly losing)

He thought he was safe from the press so far inland, but one evening, after heavy losses and much drinking, he fell asleep in his cart when he should have been setting out on the slow journey home. A press gang found him still unconscious and added James to their collection of miserable unfortunates.

18 months later, James is adapting to his new life. He has become a popular member of the larboard watch, with his ready wit and desire to make new friends. He often thinks wistfully of his horses and the farm, but he knows that he is committed to the sea now, and seeks to make the best of it.

James Johnstone, Ordinary Seaman   *90 points*

5'4" 155 lbs., brown hair, brown eyes, tanned forearms and weathered face. Open, honest demeanour.

Attributes: **ST** 12, **DX** 12, **IQ** 11, **HT** 13.

Secondary characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+2, BL 29 lbs., HP 12, Will 11, Per 11, FP 13, Basic speed 6.25, Basic Move 6.

Advantages: Absolute Direction, French (broken, spoken only), Spanish (broken, spoken only), Patron 5 (Royal Navy, 9 or less).

Disadvantages: Chummy, Code of Honour (Sailor's), Compulsive Gambling, Duty (extremely hazardous, 12 or less), Enemy (French and Spanish Navies, 9 or less), Illiterate.

Skills: Animal Handling (Horse)-11; Boating (Unpowered)-11; Brawling-13; Broadsword-11; Carousing-13; Climbing-11; Gunner (Cannon)-12; Guns (Pistol)-12; Hobby skill (Hornpipe dancing)-12; Knot-tying-12; Packing-11; Seamanship-11; Teamster (horses)-11.

Quirks: Loses his sealegs (i.e. gets seasick again) after being on shore for only 8 hours or more.